

Movie Monsters, Cinematic Mayhem, Celluloid Murder

MIDNIGHT MARQUEE

Chandu

**Dangerous
Dames**

**Kharis—
Universal's
Second Stringer**

**Furry Tails
Can Come
True:
60 Years of
Werewolf Films**

Reviews

Issue 57

Summer 1998

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Allen J. Koszowski renders a striking pose from *ALIENS*, a movie that blended action adventure and horror.

Night MONSTER!

PROWLING! KILLING! TERRIFYING!



"The WOLF MAN" IS HE MAN... OR UNHOLY BEAST?

with Claude RAINS Warren WILLIAM
Ralph BELLAMY Patric KNOWLES Bela LUGOSI
MARIA OUSPENSKAYA EVELYN ANKERS
Lon CHANEY as "The Wolf Man"

A Realart Picture Released by FILM CLASSICS, INC.



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People ask me, how is being a film fan different today in 1998 as opposed to when I started out in 1963, the year our first issue was published? The fact that I was 13 years old then and just turned 48 now probably has a great deal to do with it, but since the little boy never leaves the man, I don't know if all that's true.

First of all in 1963 the great battles were waged: Who was better, Hammer or Universal! Of course, the new Hammer film was *The Evil of Frankenstein*, and those of us who warmly remembered *Horror of Dracula*, *The Revenge of Frankenstein*, *The Brides of Dracula*, had our work cut out for us. But I always loved the Universal films, seen on TV in black and white with fuzzy reception, best of all, even more so than the Technicolor, theatrically released Hammer films (which I also loved, but in a different way). Of course, in my mind, *Horror of Dracula* could stand up to the best of Universal.

You see, some battles can never be won, are fruitless to fight, yet are still being waged 35 years later! Go to any FANEX to hear who is the winner/loser *this* year.

But some battles have changed, perhaps interestingly for the better. I can remember really putting down a great deal of the 1950s science fiction monster films in those mid-1960s days. Myself, I enjoyed watching all the Teenage Frankensteins and Draculas, all those Big Bug Invasion films, all those B horror films (*The Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake*, *The Leech Woman*, *The Wasp Woman*, *The Blob*, etc.), but they were junk compared to the Universal classics and the best of the Hammers. You see, the sense of quaint 1950s life and the innocence of that era hadn't kicked in yet, because we still lived so close to the 1950s. What seems nostalgic and quaint today seemed like low-budget garbage then. Let's face it, the makeup, the scripts, the monsters themselves could not compare to Jack Pierce and the best of Universal. No way! No, we were simply too close in time for the magic to have been woven quite yet. But stepping back several decades, the good in the bad can be better appreciated.

But what about those juvenile feuds that were waged in the letter columns of monster fanzines across the nation. Those of you who read the old issues of *Gore Creatures* (*Midnight Marquee's* title before 1976) realize that knock-down, drag out feuds were waged over the dumbest of things: Should editors charge for their magazine or should they give it away for free (thanks Gene Klein/Simmons); what is best to put on hamburgers—mustard or ketchup (thanks Robert Hancock); was *Gore Creatures* really the crud-zine (the current slang for worst amateur) that Andy Porter claimed it was; did horror movie fans belong at science fiction conventions; were Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing as good as Karloff and Lugosi; etc. These were battles to die for in our adolescent years.

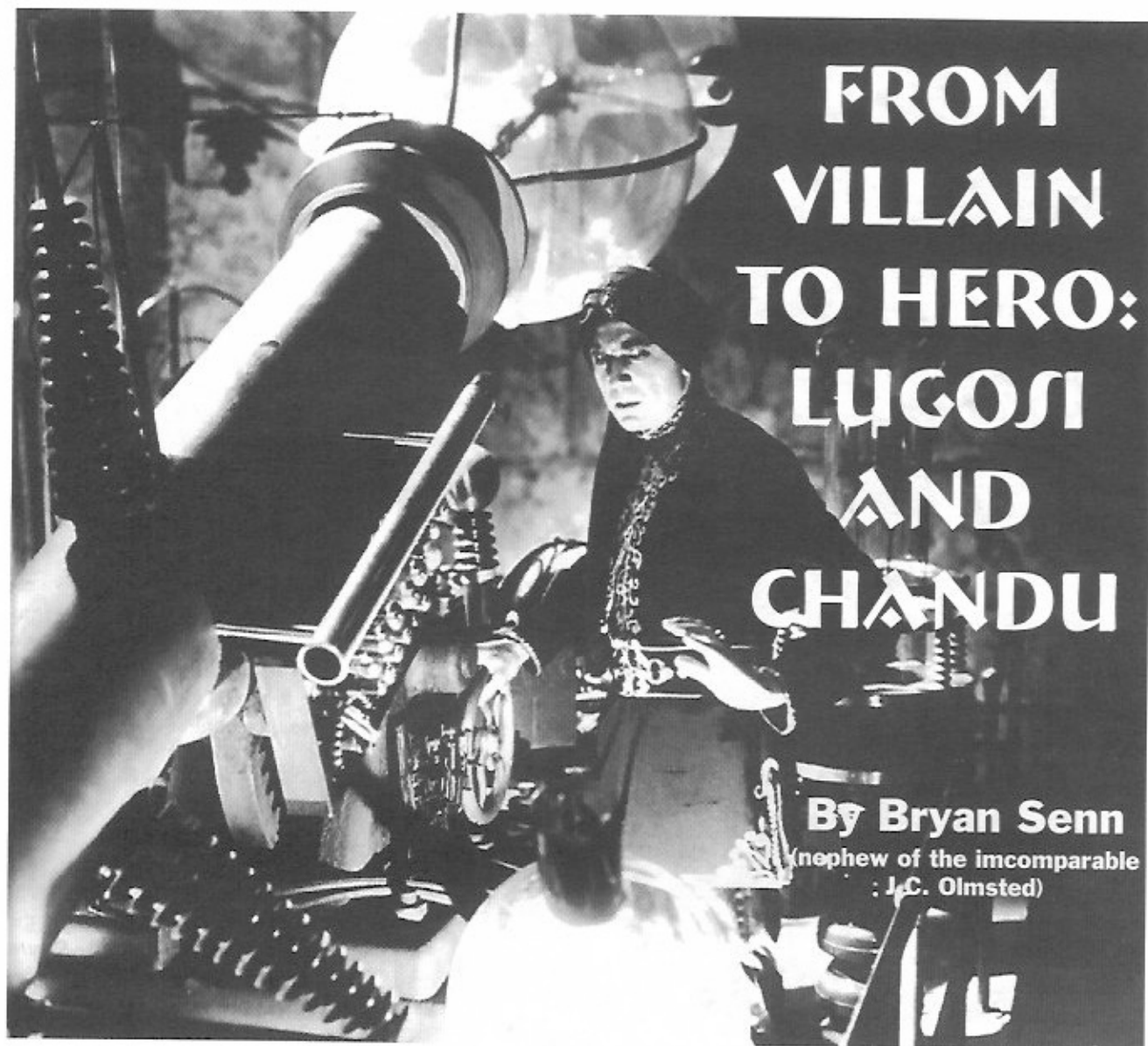
Today the letter columns of most magazines sometimes work themselves up to a frenzy, but such bitter battles are few and far between. No, if you wish to look for juvenile name-calling and beating a dead horse, you need go no further than the AOL Classic Horror Film Message Boards for some anal retentive arguments. Was Vincent Price gay or not; was that interview published real or was it bogus (since the subject of the interview was dead anyway); who is an "amateur" and what constitutes a "professional" writer when it comes to film criticism; what is the definition of profit and non-profit organization, and how can a non-profit group work with a profit group to sponsor a convention; etc. The only problem is, we were 13-17 years old when we held those raging feuds in our letter columns back in the 1960s. Today these feuds are being waged by aging adults who have enough time on their hands to bitch.

The games that film fans play haven't changed, only their ages have!

Yes, we still argue who publishes the best magazine, who are the best writers, who sponsors the best conventions, which were the best decades for horror films, who produced the best schlock features of all time, who are the greatest stars and who is the greatest director of all time.

As long as we probe, bicker, debate, tease, challenge, analyze and question in the name of knowledge and good-spirited fun, that's great and let's continue in that end. But when the battles become dirty, vicious and harmful and when egos dominate over fair play and common sense, just as was true back in the mid-1960s, isn't it time to say **enough!**

To answer the original question posed at the beginning: Nothing has changed! Isn't that a shame?



FROM VILLAIN TO HERO: LUGOSI AND CHANDU

By Bryan Senn

(nephew of the incomparable
J.C. Olmsted)

Chandu the Magician was born, innocently enough, in 1931 as a children's radio program. Noting the program's popularity, Fox purchased the screen rights to the character and cast their contract player and all-around leading man, Edmund Lowe, in the title role. Opposite Lowe, Fox chose Bela Lugosi (fresh from his success in *White Zombie*) as Chandu's nemesis, the power-hungry madman Roxor.

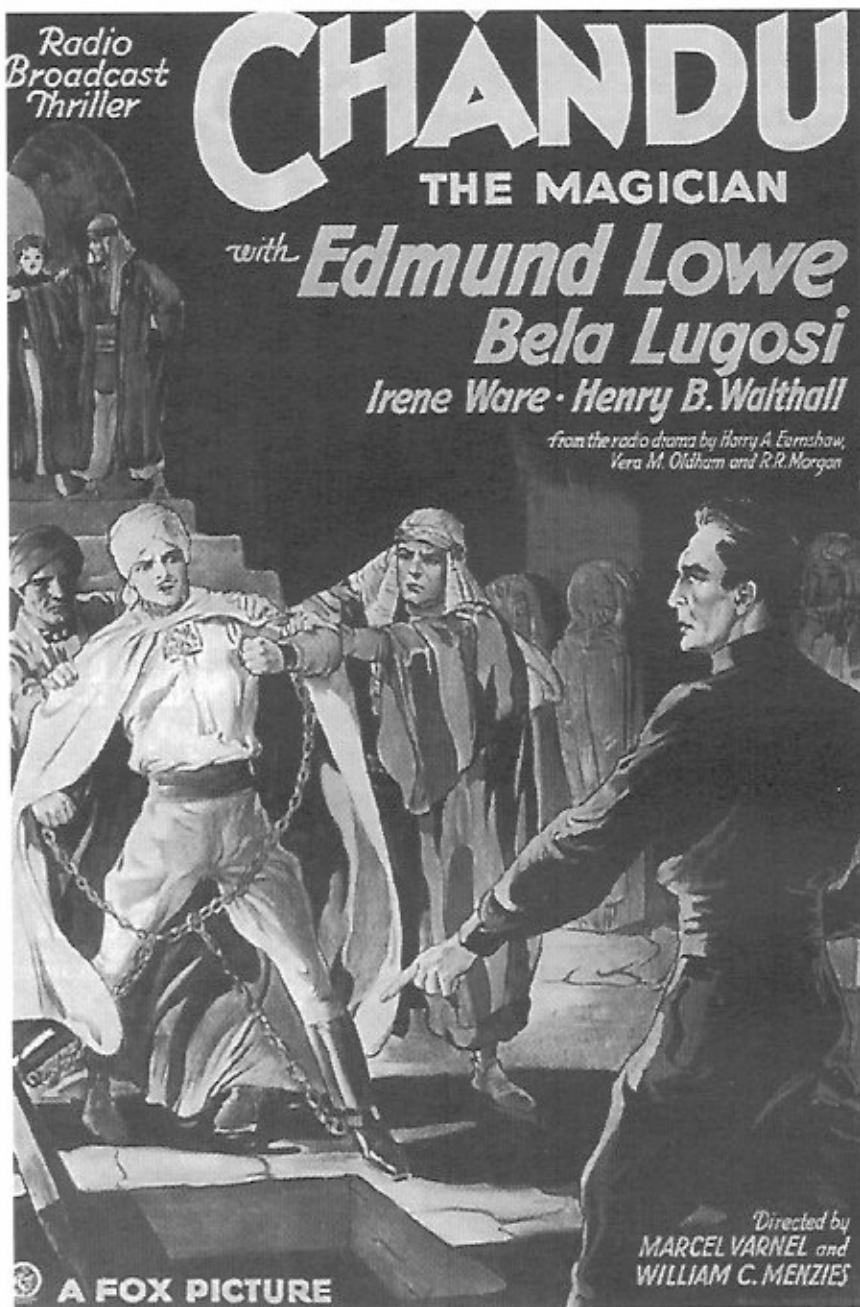
The story of *Chandu the Magician* (1932) revolves around Frank Chandler (Edmund Lowe), aka Chandu, a Westerner who has just attained the rank and power of Yogi in Tibet. "The world needs thee," proclaims Chandu's aged mentor. "Go forth in thy youth and

strength and conquer the evil that threatens mankind." This evil takes the form of Roxor, a megalomaniac scientist who has kidnapped Chandu's brother-in-law, Robert Regent (Henry B. Walthall). Robert has perfected a death ray and Roxor intends to pry the secret from his captive and use its destructive powers to rule the world.

What follows is 72 minutes of rescues, escapes and confrontations in which Chandu utilizes his Yogi powers of hypnosis and illusion to perform all manner of derring-do. This gives *Chandu the Magician* the feel of a simplistic serial (like the later 1934 and '35 serial condensations, *The Return of Chandu* and *Chandu on the Magic*

Island)—with the added advantage, however, of a feature-film budget and the production staff to go with it.

Chandu the Magician's sets and photography are both excellent, not surprising considering that famed set designer William Cameron Menzies (who served as Art Director on such classics as *The Thief of Baghdad* [1924], *Gone With the Wind* [1939], *Foreign Correspondent* [1940] and who directed *Things to Come* [1936], *Invaders from Mars* [1953] and *The Maze* [1953]) co-directed, and celebrated cinematographer James Wong Howe (*The Thin Man* [1934], *Mark of the Vampire* [1935], *Hud* [1963], *Seconds* [1966]) served as Director of Photography. In smooth



Courtesy Ronald V. Borst/Hollywood Movie Posters

tracking shots for instance, Howe's camera glides through the imposing temple sets (filled with huge columns, forbidding statues and dark corners) like some silent desecrator, generating a feeling of uneasy wonder.

While the picture *looks* good, however, little can be said for the one-dimensional characters or the melodramatic acting. As Chandu, Edmund Lowe so underplays his role that he falls flat in his feeble attempt to bring his character to mystical life. Lowe once studied for the priesthood before be-

coming an actor, though perhaps he did not study *well* enough for he fails to imbue Chandu with any semblance of spiritualism.

At the other end of the acting spectrum stands Bela Lugosi who goes overboard and makes his overripe Roxor *bigger* than life. Lugosi draws out his enthusiastic rule-the-world speeches with such relish that one simply can't take this madman seriously. Still, while no more convincing than Edmund Lowe, Lugosi becomes infinitely more *fun* to watch. In their review of the

film, *The New York Daily News* made special mention of Bela Lugosi, calling him "the very devil of a villain," and maintaining that "the sight of him sends shivers up and down one's back." Roxor proved a perfect vehicle for Lugosi's particular brand of bombast.

Though the raw materials were present to make *Chandu the Magician* an all-out horror film in the vein of the same year's *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (world-hungry madman, threatened captives, death ray, exotic locale, etc.), *Chandu* focuses on romance and adventure rather than the darker elements of sexual deviance and torture. In so doing, *Chandu the Magician* becomes a hokey, mildly entertaining adventure fantasy pleasing to the eye but bland to the palate.

Fox originally intended to do a series of Chandu pictures, but the returns on this first one were disappointing and so no further installments materialized. (This didn't stop Charles Pressley, however, from creating a *Chandu the Magician* waxworks exhibit—featuring Lugosi's Roxor—in his Hollywood Motion Picture Museum and Hall of Fame shortly after the film's release.)

Chandu soon rose from the box-office ashes, however, when independent producer Sol Lesser obtained the character rights and filmed *The Return of Chandu* in 1934 as a 12-chapter serial. Riding this celluloid phoenix was none other than Bela Lugosi—but in a very different role. This time Lugosi, the arch-villain in the original picture, was cast as Chandu—the hero!

When Lesser proposed to produce a Chandu serial, he began searching for the ideal actor to fill the mystical/romantic shoes of this popular radio character (one with a bit more charisma than the tepid Edmund Lowe). "By a surprisingly easy process of elimination," stated Lesser in his film's publicity material, "I reached the conclusion that Bela Lugosi, the Hungarian star, was the ideal I sought. On his own native stage—at the National Theatre of Budapest—his greatest successes had been achieved in romantic roles, such as Cyrano de Bergerac, Romeo, Hamlet, and Petruccio in *Taming of the Shrew*. Yet in America he had been



Lugosi draws out his enthusiastic rule-the-world speeches with such relish that one simply can't take this madman seriously.

'typed' as a 'heavy,' as in *Dracula* for instance. His voice, I found, could assume the modulations of Chandu as heard in all those countless homes throughout America where a radio was installed, and of course, his skill as an actor could be depended upon to complete the realization of what Chandu looks, acts, and talks like."

Lugosi, fresh from a more-or-less benign characterization in Universal's *The Black Cat* (1934), welcomed the chance to play a more romantic (though still mysterious) character. "*The Black Cat*," boasted the actor in a *Return of Chandu* publicity piece, "was the picture that secured for me my present stellar part in which I am at last permitted to appear before American audiences in a distinctly romantic characterization." *The Return of Chandu* wrapped on August 4, 1934 after a hectic three-week

shooting schedule. A *Hollywood Reporter* item (August 15, 1934) noted that Lugosi, now having finished *Chandu*, was checking in at Universal "for a top spot in *Daughter of Dracula*" (which ultimately evolved into *Dracula's Daughter*—without Lugosi).

An enterprising filmmaker, Lesser released *The Return of Chandu* in two forms, offering the standard 12-chapter serial to those theaters who played such fare, and also creating a seven-reel film condensed from the first five chapters for cinemas whose venue required features. (Lesser later hired editor Carl Himm to create a "sequel" feature out of the remaining seven chapters as well, calling it *Chandu on the Magic Island*.)

The plot (of both features) has Frank Chandler (aka Chandu) using his mystic Yogi powers to foil the plans of a strange cat-worshipping sect located

on "the lost island of Lemuria." The Lemurians need a sacrifice to restore their high priestess to life. Using their agents throughout the world, they attempt to kidnap and offer up the beautiful Princess Nadji of Egypt (Maria Alba), a friend (and, ultimately, love-interest) of Chandu. Thus the picture consists of numerous kidnapping attempts (some successful, some thwarted) and rescues of the fair Princess by Chandu and his tagalong nephew Bobby (Deane Benton).

Of the two "features" culled from the serial, *The Return of Chandu* is by far the superior entry. Lugosi's hypnotic talents (complete with his patented *Dracula* gestures) and forceful presence are fully exploited here. While it sports some vintage Lugosi histrionics, *Return*, however, also possesses those flaws one would expect from a cheap

SOL LESSER
Presents **Bela LUGOSI in**
THE RETURN of
CHANDU
with **MARIA ALBA**



EPISODE No. 4

THE EVIL EYE

Courtesy Ronald V. Borst/Hollywood Movie Posters

serial—crude, static photography, shallow characterizations, hollow sound and an over-loud, often inappropriate, musical score—as well as the inevitable and sometimes laughable continuity lapses that result when someone shoe-horns half-a-dozen serial episodes into a solitary feature.

For *Chandu on the Magic Island* (the second “film”), such faults are multiplied, since this second pastiche offers little to either the serial or the Lugosi fan. Unfortunately (for the viewer), Chandu loses his mystical powers in this feature, and so Lugosi’s

(hammy but entertaining) hypnotic battle of wills with the evil villains is supplanted by endless stretches of Chandu ineffectually skulking about trying to get out of one mess after another. (And—unlike in *Return*—said situations lack the verve and thrill-a-minute excitement one expects from a quality serial.) As the now-powerless hero, Lugosi can only creep about trying to avoid capture, contact his spiritual mentor (the Yogi) or lament the loss of his preternatural powers (due to an “invisible barrier of black magic”). At one point, the villain traps Chandu in

an underground maze and gloats, “You may walk the passages for years and find no way out.” With the amount of footage devoted to Lugosi moving slowly through these tunnels, one fears this may indeed become a dreary reality. About the only thrill found in *Chandu on the Magic Island* is in seeing (in full daylight) the mammoth gate from *King Kong* (used to represent the temple of Lemuria) and the Dakang port set from *The Son of Kong* (utilized as the town of Suva) which producer Sol Lesser borrowed from RKO. Not surprisingly, Lugosi appears listless and less enthusiastic here than in *The Return of Chandu* (perhaps he grew tired of the lackluster role after making the first half-dozen episodes).

Lesser’s serial/feature ploy failed to impress the critics (or moviegoers, for that matter) and the planned series of Chandu features and two-reel shorts the producer had proposed for Lugosi failed to materialize.

Even so, despite their obvious flaws, *The Return of Chandu* and (to a lesser extent) its sister feature *Chandu on the Magic Island* still remain intriguing to Lugosiphiles, if for no other reason than that for one brief moment in his Hollywood career, Bela Lugosi shouldered the burden of heroics rather than villainy.

Chandu the Magician (1932; Fox) Directors: Marcel Varnell, William C. Menzies; Screenplay: Barry Connors, Philip Klien (from the Radio Drama by Harry A. Earnshaw, Vera M. Oldham, and R.R. Morgna); Photography: James Wong Howe

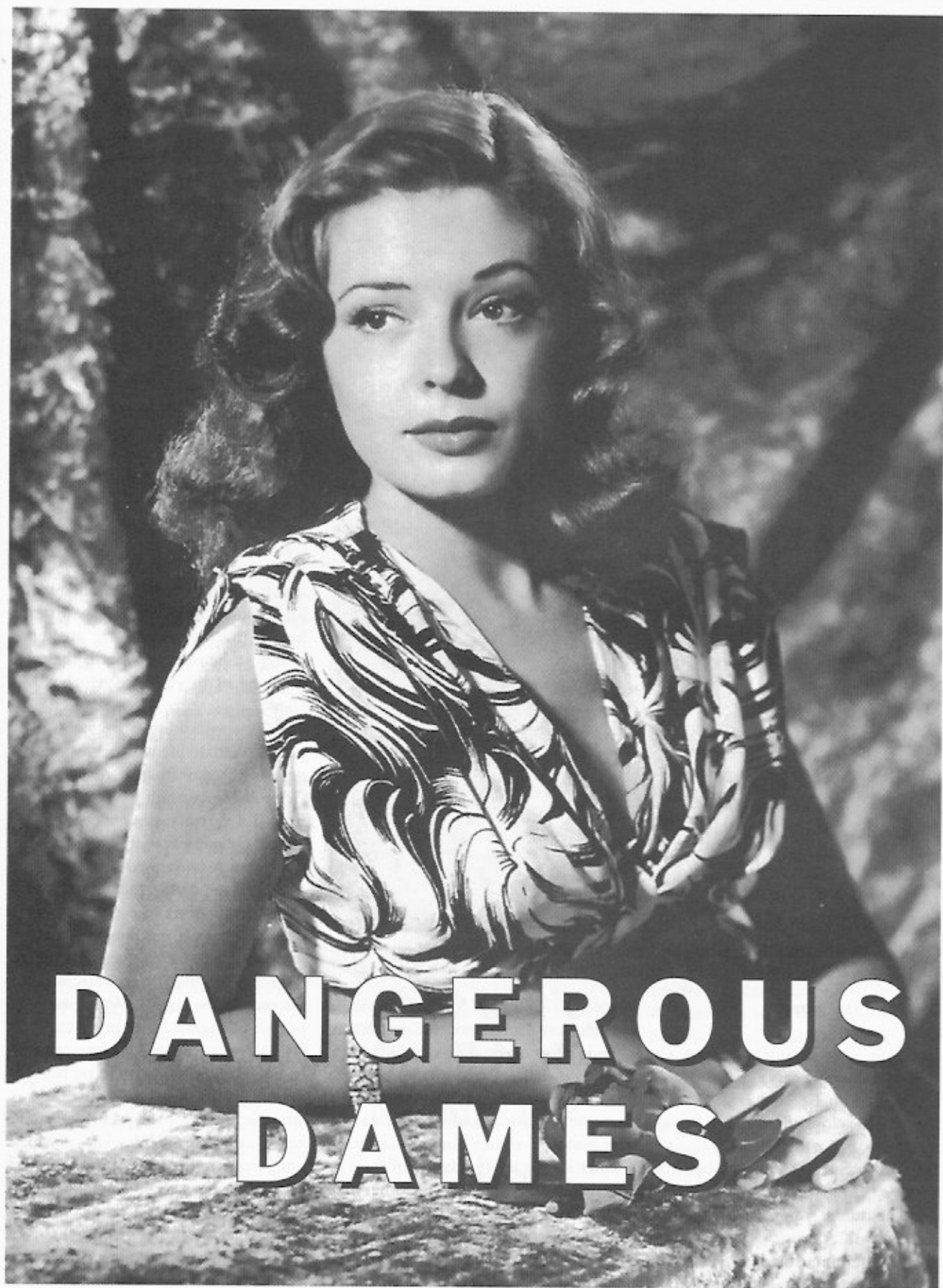
CAST: Edmund Lowe, Irene Ware, Bela Lugosi, Herbert Mundin, Henry B. Walthall, Weldon Heyburn, June Vlasak, Nestor Aber, Virginia Hammond

The Return of Chandu (1934; Principal Pictures) Director: Ray Taylor; Producer: Sol Lesser; Screenplay: Barry Barringer; Photography: John Hickson

CAST: Bela Lugosi, Maria Alba, Clara Kimball Young, Lucien Prival, Deane Benton, Phyllis Ludwig, Cyril Armbrister, Murdock McQuarrie, Wilfred Lucas, Josef Swickard, Jack Clark

Chandu on the Magic Island (1935, Principal Pictures) Director: Ray Taylor; Producer: Sol Lesser; Screenplay: Barry Barringer; Photography: John Hickson

CAST: Bela Lugosi, Maria Alba, Clara Kimball Young, Deane Benton, Phyllis Ludwig, Murdock McQuarrie, Wilfred Lucas, Josef Swickard, Jack Clark



Pictured noir bad girl—Jane Greer



Gloria Holden brings this tormented spirit to life with her restrained-yet-earnest performance, revealing the living being beneath the undead exterior.

Dracula's Daughter

by Bryan Senn

"She was beautiful when she died—a hundred years ago." So spoke Professor Von Helsing (Edward Van Sloan) at the close of *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), a film that arguably features the most fascinating female villain from horror's "Golden Age."

This titular vampire is a monster of a very different stripe. Not only is she a rare feminine bloodsucker in a (at the time) male-dominated arena, but she's a *sympathetic* one as well. Gloria

Holden's Countess Marya Zaleska is much more than a bloodsucking demon; she is a tortured soul, a pitiable victim (of her own despised heritage), as much as vicious victimizer. This sympathetic characterization adds a fascinating "monster-as-victim" subtext (a theme which makes the Frankenstein films so intriguing) to what could otherwise have become just another straightforward vampire yarn.

Though her very nature has made her cold and aloof, Zaleska's haughtiness carries a decidedly hollow ring.

"She was beautiful when she died—a hundred years ago."

While her face may remain passive, her voice can readily quicken with excitement to betray the hope and longing lurking beneath the cold countenance. Though a tortured soul, this reluctant vampire hasn't completely lost her sense of humor, for she displays a sharp wit that emphasizes her humanity. When psychiatrist/hero Jeffrey Garth makes a skeptical comment at a party, for instance, Zaleska cleverly disarms him with, "Possibly there are more things in heaven and Earth than are dreamed of in your—psychiatry, Mr. Garth."

Gloria Holden brings this tormented spirit to life with her restrained-yet-earnest performance, revealing the living being beneath the undead exterior. Holden truly uses her eyes to mirror her character's soul. She keeps her gaze almost unfocused at times, as if her inner self were concentrating elsewhere, attempting to escape from her own nightmarish existence. At other moments her staring eyes dart about, almost desperately, as if searching for the escape she craves. When she talks of living "a normal life" in which she'll "think normal things," the faraway look in her eyes and half-smile on her lips speak of the hopeful expectations stretched out before her. After her moral defeat during the piano scene (in which she once again succumbs to the bloodlust), her servant Sandor holds up Zaleska's black cloak and ring (the symbols of her nocturnal cravings) so she can venture out to claim another victim. Holden hesitates, gazing at the despised garment in ambivalent fasci-

nation. Unable to resist the lure, she finally turns and allows Sandor to drape the damning cloak on her shoulders. Holden's face remains outwardly impassive, but her eyes and downward turn of expression betray a poignant sadness at her defeat.

Such appealing torment, coupled with the irresistible lure of vampirism (symbolizing power over both sex and death), makes this diabolical daughter one of the most intriguing female villains of the silver screen.

Out of the Past

by Bruce Dettman

"She can't be all bad. No one is."

"Well, she comes the closest."

A successful film noir minus a dangerous dame is like a seasoned gumshoe without his trenchcoat and hangover. The tainted and murky underbelly of society explored in those lean and grim little thrillers of the late 1940s and early 1950s is anything but an exclusively male domain. Just try to imagine *Double Indemnity* without Barbara Stanwyck scheming for her soon-to-be late husband's life insurance payoff or *The Postman Always Rings Twice* sans two-timing Lana Turner manipulating randy John Garfield into offing her better half.

Danger for me, however, is best served slowly in escalating courses of revelation. Stanwyck and Turner were great in their parts, but let's face it, their deceitful ways and perfidious natures were about as subtle as Godzilla in a wading pool.

That's why my favorite Dangerous Dame is Jane Greer's Kathie Moffett from director Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (RKO, 1947).

At first glance, as she strolls in from the molten glare of a late Acapulco afternoon into a shadow-drenched cafe to share both cervesa and some breezy Chanderlesque banter with private dick Robert Mitchum, you're not certain of what you're dealing with except she's a knockout and definitely worth a lot more than one look. Dressed in virginal white, unwilted by the scorching sun, her voice husky, her dark locks falling wave-like over her shoulders, her eyes steady and no-nonsense as they peek out



A successful film noir minus a dangerous dame is like a seasoned gumshoe without his trenchcoat and hangover. Robert Mitchum and Jane Greer from *Out of the Past*.

from under a sombrero-sized hat, it doesn't take her long to establish the fact that she is the equal of any man, and the better of quite a few.

Director Tourneur, according to Greer (who was only 23 when she took the part) instructed her to play a "good girl" for the first half of the film and a "bad girl" for the remainder, but I think, thanks to the actress' deft handling of the shadings and nuances of the character, that the demarcation line is hardly so obvious or telegraphed. From the very beginning Kathie, on the lam after ventilating unctuous gangster Kirk Douglas with a few—but not quite

enough—ounces of lead, is no push-over. She is refined, soft-spoken, poised and almost aloof, but no one would confuse her with Mother Teresa. Still, what would later emerge as her total abandonment and disdain of everything and everyone standing in her way is at first beautifully camouflaged, a smoldering suggestion kept discreetly at bay beneath an arched and sublimely orchestrated facade of almost child-like composure.

But once she gets rolling, look out!

The first suggestion of her sociopathical side is showcased as she stands near frozen, not by fear but rather rapture, watching temporary boyfriend Mitchum manhandle ex-partner Steve Brodie in a dandy display of fisticuffs. A minuscule snarl of sensual satisfaction plays confidently across her lovely features as she surveys the action and then, as if suddenly bored by the spectacle, plugs Brodie with all the concern of a chain smoker discarding a butt. Before the smoke has cleared she has also skipped out on Mitchum, who looks like the New York subway has just rolled over him. As it develops he might have been better off had that been the case.

From here on it's one scheme, one nasty plan, a half dozen knives in the

**"She can't
be all bad.
No one is."
"Well, she
comes the
closest."**



Michelle Bauer's performance makes *The Tomb* memorable.

worse." Too bad the Israeli prime minister passed away seven years before the release of *The Tomb* (1985), which tells the tale of Nefratis, an ancient Egyptian sorceress revived in modern-day Los Angeles, lusting for blood and immortal life. Her 84-minute saga might have changed the Russian-born political leader's opinion.

The brainchild of low-budget producer-director Fred Olen Ray, *The Tomb* started out as an attempt to finagle money out of New World Pictures, which at the time had optioned F. Paul Wilson's book for filming. By showing footage already shot, *auteur* Ray hoped New World would buy him off because of the title conflict, then use the footage later in some other, unrelated project.

But the best laid schemes of mice and B-movie impresarios often go awry, because Trans World Entertainment loved what they saw in the trailer (shot on faux Egyptian sets left over from a Wrangler jeans TV commercial) and bankrolled the rest. As it turned out, New World threatened to sue, but Ray had covered himself by copyrighting the title based on an H.P. Lovecraft story (which the movie wasn't). *The Tomb* is '80s sexploitation at its finest (just try to forget the incongruous nightclub striptease by the incredibly-endowed Kitten Natividad), paying tribute to a number of horror movie predecessors and presenting the most merciless lady vampire ever on screen.

Roused from her eternal slumber by a couple of fortune hunters, Nefratis (Michelle Bauer) rips the heart from one (restoring her youth and beauty) and vows revenge on the other for stealing an ancient amulet she needs to stay alive. A sudden earthquake reburies the tomb and allows him to escape. She reappears in southern California, fetchingly dressed in a gauzy woven dress and open toe sling back pumps (which Ray likes to focus on as she stalks her human prey), fluent in English and modern ways.

Nefratis tracks down her tomb's surviving defiler (Richard Alan Hench) posthaste, inserting a live scarab into his chest to assert control over his will. He tells her he has sold the artifact to a collector, whom she seeks out and kills, drinking his blood.

The murdered man's son (David Pearson) and the nearsighted niece (Susan Stokey) of a rival Egyptian collector (Cameron Mitchell) join forces to solve the crime.

The pair call on an expert (John Carradine) in the field who tells them of the horrors Nefratis perpetrated millennia ago. A priestess of Set, Princess Nefratis "sustained her magical energy by drinking the blood of the living." Her own fearful father has her buried alive and the location of her tomb made secret for "her supernatural powers were matched only by her cruelty." In her ancient prime, Nefratis slaughtered newborn babies and drank their blood

Nefratis is utterly ruthless.

and (as the tomb scene vividly depicted) barehandedly tore the hearts out of full-grown men.

Eventually, the heroine finds herself about to be ceremoniously sacrificed to perpetuate Nefratis' life, even as the hero and the graverobber (freed from the evil princess' buggy enchantment) race to her rescue. "Her ancient

fury sought its revenge," the ads for the movie warned us, so "their courage was our last hope!"

The Tomb has its tongue stuck so firmly in its cheek it's a wonder the tip doesn't poke through the soft tissue. The actors recite dialogue verbatim from *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, and almost all have names copped from characters in the Universal mummy series: the graverobber's guide is named Youssef from *The Mummy's Ghost*; the fortune hunter is named John Banning from *The Mummy's Tomb*; John Carradine played Professor Andoheb, from *The Mummy's Hand*; Susan Stokey played Helen from *The Mummy*. Cameron Mitchell, in a nod to the putative Lovecraftian origins of the story, played Howard Phillips.

In no small measure, it is Michelle Bauer as Nefratis that makes *The Tomb* so memorable. Born in 1958, the one-time *Penthouse* Pet of the Month (July 1981) used *The Tomb* as her escape from the soft-core bondage shorts that filled her resume till then and never looked back. Forget Linnea Quigley and Brinke Stevens. Unlike her highly polished and promoted rivals for '80s scream queen fame, Michelle Bauer had something else: an aura of accessibility. With dark curls, an outdoorsy glow and a smile that always seemed to be delighted with the goings-on, Michelle Bauer was a sex symbol unaware, the naughty-but-nice girl next door.

And even with last-minute deletion of gory violence and nudity (some of which turned up in *Beverly Hills Vamp* four years later), Michelle Bauer's performance still presents a vampire's malevolence incarnate. Nefratis is utterly ruthless. She is the complete (and welcome) opposite of the sympathetic vampire, like Milton's Satan fallen from God's grace, which the movies began to emphasize in the '70s and '80s.

Unlike her screen brethren, Nefratis has no pangs of guilt over her bloodthirstiness nor does she mourn for her lost humanity. Going against convention, she doesn't even fall for the hunky leading man in hopes he will lead her back to the straight and narrow.

At one point, confronted by a pair of customs agents (Peter Conway and

Brad Arrington), Nefratis asks "Who the hell are you?" with such world-weary contemptuousness it should become her signature line. Nefratis doesn't really care—they'll both be dead in a minute, no matter what they say. Though a little stilted in earlier dialogue, Michelle Bauer pulls this one line off so perfectly all else is forgivable. She dominated *The Tomb* throughout.

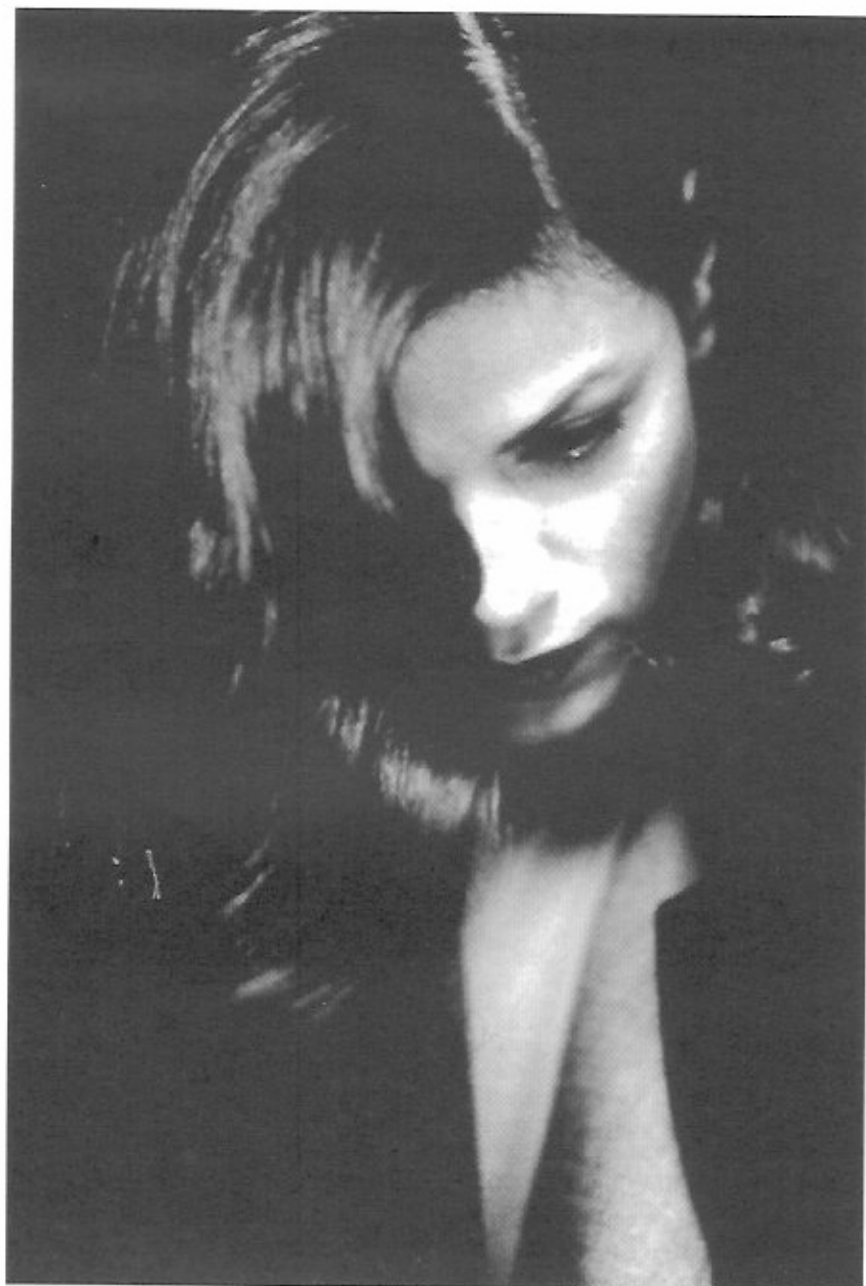
The Tomb, made for \$135,000, earned over three and a half million for Trans World, saving it from bankruptcy (the company had taken a financial bath with the abortive *Creature* the year before), and was definitely the breakthrough film for Fred Olen Ray, still a regular fixture in video stores. Though it may be dismissed nowadays for its camp humor and low budget, and hopefully forgiven its bigotry (the Egyptians are referred to as towel-heads and rag-heads), *The Tomb* survives as a two-fold vehicle: as a springboard to the B-movie mainstream for one actress, and for one of the most graphic depictions of female evil ever.

The Last Seduction

by Jonathan Malcolm Lampley

For my money the most dangerous dame in movie history is Bridget Gregory (Linda Fiorentino), the beautiful but deadly protagonist of John Dahl's *The Last Seduction* (1994). After convincing her husband Clay (Bill Pullman) to broker a \$700,000 drug deal, Bridget steals the proceeds and heads for Chicago. Upon the advice of her attorney (J.T. Walsh, in one of his most memorably reptilian roles), Bridget hides out in Beston, a prototypical wholesome small town. Boredom quickly gets to this New York-bred girl and she begins a torrid affair with local stud Mike (Peter Berg), who promptly falls in love with her. Too bad for him; Bridget, now operating under the alias Wendy Kroy, is desperate for a fall guy to help her wriggle out of the mess—and Mike's hormone-drenched emotions make him the perfect patsy.

As Bridget, Fiorentino is irredeemably evil. She dumps her husband, leaving him at the mercy of impatient loan sharks; she responds to every friendly



Linda Fiorentino, in *The Last Seduction*, takes delight in creating a female character totally free of the social constraints placed on woman.

overture from the plain folk of Beston with naked contempt; and she enthusiastically manipulates every male that comes within striking distance, either with voracious sexuality (aimed at younger men) or a thin disguise of naiveté (directed toward older guys). Her entire existence is dedicated to her own survival; even during the most passionate interludes she requires her lovers to practice safe sex (certainly a 1990s notion for film noir!).

Yet Fiorentino somehow makes the character work—her delight in creating

a female character totally free of the social constraints placed on woman is palpable. In one of the most ghoulishly amusing scenes, Bridget stubs her cigarette out in an apple pie baked by Mike's grandmother; for those of us who exult in the film noir's ability to shatter traditional American values, it is a moment of triumph.

It helps that Dahl populates his movie with a legion of slimeballs—the audience shares Bridget's glee in taking these suckers for a ride. Nowhere is this element more pronounced than



Ellen Berent (Gene Tierney), pregnant, venomously hisses, "Look at me! I hate the little beast! I wish it would die!" and throws herself down the stairs, killing the fetus.

in Bridget's relationship with Mike. Berg plays him as an earnest but hopeless hick, vainly trying to get close to a woman wholly incapable of emotional intimacy regardless of her lusty appetites. Foolishly Mike insists on cuddling up with a rattlesnake, in spite of the warnings the snake herself provides. When the other shoe inevitably falls, the audience can't help but feel that Mike deserves as much scorn as sympathy.

The Last Seduction is far from perfect—director Dahl's stylish camerawork cannot completely obscure the outrageous improbabilities of Steve Baranick's coincidence-laden script—but the picture works thanks to Fiorentino's ferocious performance. The *femme fatale* is one of the most important ingredients in film noir, but as often as not the characters immortal-

ized by Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Bennett, Kim Basinger and other actresses are revealed to have at least a modicum of gold in their hardened hearts. Linda Fiorentino breaks with this tradition, offering a character with pure malignant ice instead of a soul; yet she does it in such a way that the audience finds itself guiltily rooting for Bridget/Wendy. Never has a bad girl been so good.

Leave Her to Heaven

by John E. Parnum

Leave Her to Heaven (1945) is considered by some to be the first film noir in color. This malapropian definition eluded my 10-year-old mind, which was distracted and fascinated by the wickedest woman I had ever seen on the screen. Oh, sure, there had been

Maria Montez as the evil twin sister reigning barbarously over a tropical island in *Cobra Woman*, and of course there was Paula, the savage ape woman in that Universal jungle series. These, however, were mostly fantasy figures who left no mental scars on my impressionable youth. But my parents' whispers after seeing Ellen Berent (as portrayed by the glamorous Gene Tierney) in the William A. Bacher production *Leave Her to Heaven* in no way prepared me for the monstrous acts re-

"Yes, she was that sort of monster!"

vealed in this Jo Swerling screenplay based on the Ben Ames Williams bestselling novel.

Ellen Berent and writer Richard Harland (Cornel Wilde) meet on a train to New Mexico, and she informs him that he reminds her of her recently deceased father. Richard meets other members of the family, sister Ruth (Jeanne Crain) and the mother, Mrs. Berent (Mary Phillips), who informs him that Ellen and her father were inseparable. After Ellen scatters her father's ashes from horseback in the mountains to the accompaniment of Alfred Newman's chilling score, she wastes no time in breaking off her engagement to her fiancé, up-and-coming district attorney Russell Quinton (Vincent Price). She proposes to Richard, and his lawyer friend Glen Robie (Ray Collins) warns him, when Ellen comes in first in a swimming race, "Ellen always wins."

After a hurried wedding, Ellen and Richard retreat to his lakeside cabin in the Maine woods where we get our first glimpse of Ellen's possessiveness. Her promises of "I'll never let you go" and "I don't want anybody else but me doing anything for you; nobody else in the house but us" take on darker meanings than just terms of endearment. She sus-

piciously badgers handyman Leick Thorne (Chill Wills) about her husband's innocent flirtation with a prom queen in high school and continuously interrupts Richard's writing sessions declaring "I hate your chapters... they take up too much of your time." When Richard surprises Ellen by inviting her mother and Ruth for a visit, she is livid. Mrs. Berent explains Ellen's jealousy by telling Richard, "There's nothing wrong with Ellen, it's just that she loves too much."

Richard is devoted to his crippled younger brother Danny (Darryl Hickman) who lives with them, and when Ellen admits that she can't share her husband with anyone, we sense impending doom for the boy. But I was totally unprepared for the terrifying scene in which Ellen methodically suggests that Danny try to swim from their rowboat to the lake shore and then deliberately lets the boy slowly drown. This wasn't sultry siren Maria Montez sacrificing a slave to a cobra god, this was an evil, calculating woman whose selfishness bordered on psychotic: something I'd never been exposed to before.

Ellen doesn't stop there. She becomes pregnant and venomously hisses, "Look at me! I hate the little beast! I wish it would die!" and throws herself down the stairs, killing the fetus. When Richard dedicates his book to Ruth, Ellen accuses him of having an affair with her sister, and admits to her murderous deeds. This is all too much for Richard, who storms out of her life. But Ellen's possessiveness is not finished. Realizing Richard is gone for good, she takes arsenic, making it appear that she was poisoned by Ruth, a scene repeated years later by Glenn Close in an early version of *Fatal Attraction*, unshown except to Japanese audiences. In a climactic film noir trial in which Russell Quinton prosecutes Ruth, Richard confesses to a stunned courtroom that it was his wife "who sought to possess everything she loved, who loved only for what it could bring her, whose love estranged her own father and mother, whose love possessed her father until he couldn't call his soul his own, who by her own confession killed my



Kathleen Turner stars as a serial killer in John Waters' bizarre ode to suburban living, *Serial Mom* (1994).

brother, killed her own unborn child, and who is now reaching from the grave to destroy her sister. Yes, she was that sort of monster!" Mind-boggling stuff for my pre-teen mind to absorb.

Leave Her to Heaven still holds up well today, although the 1940s Hays code regulation of twin beds seems archaic by current standards. Leon Shamroy's spectacular photography around the New Mexico, Georgia and Maine locations garnered him an Academy Award. Ms. Tierney, nominated for best actress, lost out to Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce*. Poor Gene. Hopefully, portraying such dangerous dames as Ellen Berent was not the cause of the nervous breakdowns

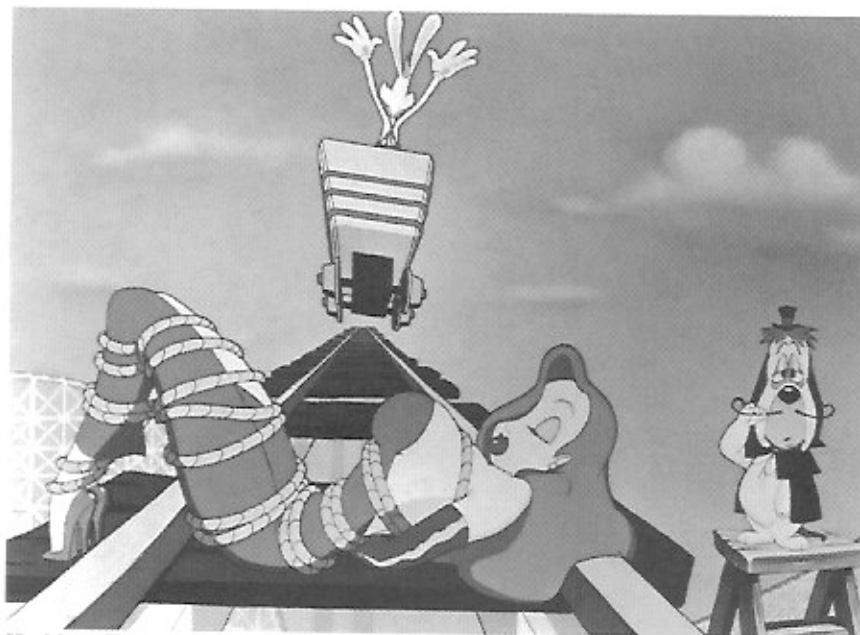
that sent her to several mental institutions where she not only thought she was being served human flesh at meals but could actually tell you whose flesh it was.

Kathleen Turner

by Susan Svehla

From the moment she first slunk her way onto the silver screen in *Body Heat* in 1981, Kathleen Turner has turned in performance after performance as a sultry, bitchy, scheming seductress who weaves a deadly spell over her hapless victims and an enthralled audience.

Sensorama could have been another name for *Body Heat* as the tropi-



Kathleen Turner put that distinctively sexy voice to good use in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988).

cal heat of Florida mixes with the torrid passions of Matty Walker (Turner) who seduces dense attorney Ned Racine (William Hurt). Audiences could almost feel the warmth as she seduces Ned one hot summer night.

"You're not very smart. I like that in a man."

Matty uses the smitten Ned in a classic film noir plot, convincing him to do away with her dull husband. In one memorable scene she stands inside the house as the aroused Ned desperately tries to get inside. He smashes a window to reach the object of his desire who stands there waiting seductively. Never has a scene filled with such animalistic desire been better staged.

Matty manages to lure Ned into her trap and, pinning the murder rap on him, heads for more pleasant climes with a boatload of loot.

In 1983 Turner appeared with Steve Martin in the sweet comedy, *The Man with Two Brains*. Turner as Martin's wife Dolores is again the ultimate bitch who is done in by the mysterious Elevator Killer. Martin transplants a brain he has fallen in love with into the gorgeous body of Turner.

Turner would once again play a bad girl in the highly acclaimed *Prizzi's Honor* (1985). As a hitwoman who has crossed the Prizzi family while falling

in love with fellow hitman Charley Partanna (Jack Nicholson), a member

"I'm not bad... I'm just drawn that way."

of the Prizzis, Turner turns in a stellar performance as a good girl gone bad.

"I'm not bad... I'm just drawn that way." Turner put that distinctively sexy voice to good use in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) as the scorching Jessica Rabbit—a "good" toon with a body for sin.

The next year she would appear with Michael Douglas in a film guaranteed to scare all but the most lovestruck couples away from holy matrimony, *War of the Roses*. The polar opposite of their first pairing, the delectable *Romancing the Stone*, *War of the Roses* is the story of a love turned to pure unadulterated hate. As Barbara Rose, Turner is wickedly funny as the wife who so despises her materially obsessed husband she will go to any

length to get rid of him. The final scene, as the couple lay in a broken heap on the living room floor of the home they have destroyed each other over, is a truly macabre highlight in this black comedy. Oliver (Douglas) painfully reaches for the hand of his wife, who with her last ounce of strength disgustingly shakes it off.

Finally, Turner stars as a serial killer in John Waters' bizarre ode to suburban living, *Serial Mom* (1994). Turner stars as your average next door mom, Beverly Sutphin. Loving wife, doting mother, gourmet cook, and oh yes, she just happens to kill people who annoy her.

Kathleen Turner is the epitome of filmland's dangerous dame: beautiful, deadly, smart and someone you want to stay as far away from as possible.

The Egyptian

by John E. Parnum

Anybody ever hear of Bella Darvi, born Bayla Wegier in Sosnowiec, Poland in 1928? I didn't think so. Bella was a French leading lady briefly until she was whisked over to 20th Century-Fox by cigar-smoking mogul producer Darryl F. Zanuck who cast her in three early 1950s Cinemascope pictures as well as making her his mistress, much to the consternation of Mrs. Zanuck. In two of these films she was the female lead: in 1954 opposite Richard Widmark in *Hell and High Water* and 1955 as Kirk Douglas' girlfriend in *The Racers*. But it is her supporting role as the voluptuous and scheming Babylonian madam of a house of pleasure in the Valley of the Nile over 33 centuries ago for which she will shine as one of Hollywood's most dangerous dames, at least in my book.

Directed by Michael Curtiz, with a screenplay adapted from Mika Waltari's novel by Philip Dunne and Casey Robinson, *The Egyptian* (1954) tells the story of Sinuhe (Edmund Purdom) and how he was found in a boat of reeds by a physician for the poor, and raised by him and his wife as their natural son. A serendipitous lion hunt in the desert in which Sinuhe and his boastful friend Horemheb (Victor Mature) save the life of the new Pharaoh,

Akhanton (Michael Wilding), results in Horemheb being appointed to the palace guards (his low birth had previously prevented this) and Sinuhe being hired as house physician. To celebrate their good fortune, they visit a luxurious brothel run by the enchanting seductress, Nefer (Bella Darvi).

Sinuhe is captivated by Nefer's incredible beauty as she reclines on an exquisite divan, stroking a Persian cat and mesmerizing him with her intoxicating eyes. "You're beautiful beyond all dreams," he tells her. "I feel the fever of Thebes in my blood and I know that I was born to live in the sunset of the world and that nothing matters... nothing but what I see in your eyes." She caresses the cat and tells him: "A cat's paws are soft, but they have claws. A cat takes pleasure in tormenting its victim. Not until the creature is nearly dead will he show pity and put an end to it." Sinuhe is oblivious to her warning and, when she invites him to return after the other guests leave, he admits he has no gift to give her. She smiles and tells him, "The greatest gift any man can bring to a woman is his innocence, which he can give only once."

He returns as she is bathing in preparation to entertain a visiting merchant. When Sinuhe jealously objects, she tells him she needs gifts to protect herself. "I ask for nothing," she whispers to him, touching the gold necklace around his neck, a present from the Pharaoh and his only valuable possession. When he gives it to her, she nonchalantly drops it in a chest with her other treasures and still refuses him. She poutingly accuses him of lying about having nothing else to give her and reminds him that he owns a house and many instruments of copper.

Despite warnings by Horemheb (now commander of the guards), his faithful one-eyed servant Kaptah (Peter Ustinov), Merit (Jean Simmons) the barmaid who loves him and the treacherous Baketamon (Gene Tierney) who seeks to overthrow Akhanton and knows the true origins of Sinuhe's birth, the bewitched physician returns again to Nefer. After he has given her the deed to his house and all his medical tools, she says she wants the splendid tomb



"A cat's paws are soft, but they have claws. A cat takes pleasure in tormenting its victim. Not until the creature is nearly dead will he show pity and put an end to it," states Nefer (Bella Darvi) from *The Egyptian*.

that his parents have saved up for in the City of the Dead. Sinuhe is appalled: "You ask me to rob my parents of immortality, to let their bodies rot into nothingness like the carcasses of slaves and animals?" "I ask for nothing," she reminds him, "but do this one thing for me and I will show you the finer perfection of love."

Merit tries to talk him out of this unspeakable act, but he tells her, "The

man you know is dead!" and returns to Nefer with the deeds to his parents' house and tomb. "From this hour, I am accursed and disgraced before Gods and men. It is a high price to pay." When he asks Nefer to reward him with the finer perfection of love, she orders him out and tells a servant never to admit him again: "Sooner or later even a cat tires of its game." Sinuhe returns home to find his now penniless parents have

poisoned themselves and have left him a letter forgiving him with love. To make amends, Sinuhe takes their bodies to the House of Death where he works for 90 days as payment for preserving their bodies. Then he and Kaptah travel throughout the world in poverty for many years. On their return, he is reunited with Merit: "Can't you believe in a love that asks for nothing?" she asks him.

After he has set up practice again in Thebes, he receives a patient, rapidly aged and eaten away with disease. It is Nefer. "Can you help me?" she begs, opening her robes for him to examine her. He tells her he can save her life but cannot restore her beauty. He has dreamed of this revenge for 10 years, but now can feel only pity for her.

Although Nefer never committed the sin of murder as did other dangerous dames in this article, she did far worse by destroying a man's soul. Bella Darvi, with her sultry voice between a lisp and a purr, was not a great actress, but her portrayal as the heartless whore in *The Egyptian* is most convincing and one I shall remember for a lifetime. Too bad her career then spiraled downward, ending with her suicide in Monte Carlo on September 10, 1971 at 44. She was an exquisite Nefer!

Out of the Past

by Joe Guilfoyle

"And then I saw her. Coming out of the sun. And I knew why Whit didn't care about the 40 grand." The lines are Robert Mitchum's, playing private investigator Jeff Bailey, spoken over a flashback as he watches Jane Greer (Kathie Moffett) enter a bar in Acapulco in director Jacques Tourneur's quintessential film noir *Out of the Past*. Bailey, who was hired to find Moffett when she skiddaddles with a mobster's money, is seduced in a film noir minute by the darkest, most dangerous dame in the history of the genre. Although *Out of the Past* has a considerable reputation today, it was essentially viewed by critics as a B movie when it was first released by RKO in November of 1947. It was, in fact, one of 39 features produced that year by a studio often associated with programmers like the Fal-



con series. However, *Out of the Past* was clearly a major undertaking for RKO, who budgeted the film at \$600,000, and approved a shooting schedule of 60 days (which was comparable to many A pictures of the period). The film's screenplay is credited to Geoffrey Homes (a pseudonym for Dan Mainwaring) and is based on his novel *Build My Gallows High*, which was the shooting title of the picture (as well as the title of the film when it was released in the UK). However, the film went through several rewrites before production began. At one point, author James Cain (*The Postman Always Rings*

Twice) wrote a treatment of the novel which reportedly changed the story considerably. Upon reflection, the studio decided it was happier with Homes' original draft, and then hired Frank Fenton to "punch up" the dialogue. The studio actually spent nearly \$40,000 of the film's budget on the original screenplay and the various rewrites. The result is a complex story with some of the best dialogue ever written for a genre film. RKO assigned the project to the talented Jacques Tourneur who had directed several hits for the studio, chief among them *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie*.

**"An then I
saw her.
Coming out
of the sun.
And I knew
why Whit
didn't care
about the 40
grand."**

Jane Greer was 23 when she made *Out of the Past*, and although she would be featured in a number of pictures over the next 20 years, she (unfortunately) never got another role as good as Kathie Moffett. As Moffett, Greer is deliciously bad. To know her is to be her victim. Greer plays Moffett with a cool desperation. As an actress, she is not afraid to be unlikable in the part. She never signals her vulnerability as anything but a trap. She is an amoral creature who will survive at any cost. Greer is so good, you have to wonder if you would be any smarter than Mitchum's character. Even caught in the trap, you don't quite believe Bailey's revulsion when he tells Moffett, "Get out. I have to sleep in this room." Bailey represents the fool who is also the hero. He may know better, but Moffett knows best. She is the game and nobody stops playing until death do they part. Even as Bailey sets in motion the final deadly trap, he is resolved to his fate. "If you're thinking of anyone else," Kathie tells him, "Don't. Because you are no good for anyone else—except me. You're no good and neither am I. That's why we deserve each other."

Out of the Past is much more than smart dialogue and atmosphere. It made

a star out of Robert Mitchum, who never looked better emerging from the dark, raincoat clad, pausing to light up a smoke. It's hard to imagine anyone else being as effective as he was as Jeff Bailey (Humphrey Bogart, John Garfield and Dick Powell all turned down the role). Even then he seemed world weary yet hip as well as vulnerable. But, in many ways, this is Jane Greer's movie. She is a bad girl for all time. Even in a film like Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*, it is hard to find someone quite as ruthless as Kathie Moffett. She is film noir's dark mistress. A temptress with a heart of cold.

***The Wizard of Oz*
by Steve Thornton**

Horror and science fiction films are arguably among the most sexist of film genres. So many memorable male monsters and villains have been featured over the years, from werewolves and mad scientists to mummies and visitors from outer space. But what of the ladies? Despite an intriguing wealth of possibilities, the golden age horrors that we all know and love were somewhat reticent when it came to offering great set-chewing, scene-stealing, villainous parts to the fairer sex. Only when I cast the cinematic net wider into the realm of fantasy and mysteries do I find distaff characters that can hold a candle to the Gothic monsters that forever haunt my movie screen. For who among us did not have their childhood dreams haunted by the specter of Ms. Hamilton's amply named Wicked Witch, her face a mask of unrepentant evil, her voice gone mad with cackling laughter? Whether commanding forth her hellish army of flying monkeys or extending a bony finger to threaten helpless Dorothy, Hamilton's character tapped into the frightened recesses of my childhood imagination like few other film characters did. And like all memorable performances, this one conveyed a certain subtle truism—though life's challenges may seem insurmountable, with a little courage and enough perseverance they can be overcome. Like some nefarious, black-clad spider, Hamilton's performance left behind an impression as endearing and enduring



Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch face is a mask of unrepentant evil, her voice gone mad with cackling laughter.

as Lugosi's Dracula or Karloff's Frankenstein Monster.

Margaret Hamilton's appearance in *The Wizard of Oz* was another of those casting coups that MGM used to pull off with stunning regularity. The part seems so tailored for her it is difficult to imagine another performer in the role. (Gale Sondergaard, who was also reportedly up for the part, would have given an interesting though undoubtedly more restrained performance.) A veteran of over 70 films, Hamilton was one of Hollywood's busiest character actresses in the late 1930s and early 1940s, appearing in such diverse fare as *My Little Chickadee* and *The Ox-Bow Incident*. Comedy was arguably her forte, although film producers saw fit to cast her in all manner of roles. A

typical Hamilton characterization would find her appearing as a peevish spinster, her sourpuss disposition suggesting nothing less than a case of chronic constipation. The role of Miss Gulch from *The Wizard of Oz*'s opening reel is, in fact, typical of the performances in which she would specialize. That Hamilton could turn the fantasy level up a notch and create a character as memorable as her wonderfully Wicked Witch says much about the talents of this familiar but often overlooked character performer.

I have been told by Those Who Know that *The Wizard of Oz* was only moderately successful on its initial release and did not achieve classic status until it became a televised rite of spring. This might explain Hamilton's dearth of appearances in subsequent fantasy films; her filmography only indicates later roles in Universal's *Invisible Woman*, the William Castle kiddie matinee *13 Ghosts* and a voice-over in 1974's *Journey Back to Oz*. While old time moviegoers may remember Margaret Hamilton primarily for her appearances as an irksome neighbor or a meddlesome maiden aunt, baby boomers are likely to forever think of her as the dark denizen of Dorothy's dream world. Speaking for myself, I know I could never watch one of her Maxwell House Coffee commercials without looking for a telltale broomstick hiding somewhere in the corner.

Perhaps someday, a talented and enterprising filmmaker will helm the classic cinematic version of J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* or bring to life one of Edgar Allan Poe's haunted and haunting heroines. Until then, Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch of the West stands unrivaled in my imagination as the ultimate expression of female evil.

Detour

by Cindy Ruth Collins

Perhaps the most frightening moment in the entire PRC catalogue comes when a young hitchhiker raises up her head from sleep, and demands, "What did you do with the body?"

It is a moment in which the audience may as easily start with terror as our already unstrung driver does—and



Vera (Ann Savage) from *Detour*. How could she possibly know that Al Roberts had ditched a body by the side of the road?

this in a bargain-basement film noir from a studio whose "horrors" generally inspired more belly laughs than chills.

We have never seen this girl Vera (Ann Savage) before, and neither has her lift, Al Roberts (Tom Neal). How could she possibly know that he ditched a body by the side of the road? Could she, as her driver imagines, be the dead

man's ghost come back to haunt him? Her cadaverous looks, complete with sharp, angular pre-punk features and dark bags around the eyes, give us no assurance that we have not taken a sudden turn into supernatural horror.

Yet we have not. Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour* takes place solidly in this world, and Vera, its oh-so-dangerous dame, has not achieved ghosthood... yet. But oh

Vera is a completely irredeemable woman.

yes, we have entered Al Roberts' greatest nightmare, and that nightmare has only just begun.

On his hitchhiking trip across country to marry his fiancée, Roberts' only crime (according to his internal monologue, at least) was to panic when Charlie Haskell died on him along the road. That panic has made him pawn to Vera, a woman longing to drag him into the pit of her own corruption. This detour, from hope and love to despair and captivity, provides the tension and indeed the psychological horror in this film.

Vera knows there must be a body because she knew Charlie Haskell, the original driver of this car. And she holds Roberts hostage to that knowledge throughout the remainder of her short life, threatening him with the "perfume" that the state of Arizona dishes out to murderers, if he will not do her will. She demands money from him, teases him sexually; but ultimately, she wants Roberts to swindle Haskell's dying father out of his millions, and she plans to turn him in for murder if he will not.

Vera, as painted by Roberts' narration and played (impeccably) by Ann Savage, is a completely irredeemable woman. *The Motion Picture Guide* calls her "one of the most despicable vixens in the history of cinema." Though the film does soften and cast her momentarily as a victim of consumption, Vera's illness only makes her seem even more persistently evil. Her relentlessly sadistic treatment of Roberts—holding him captive to his fears for the sake of her own financial gain, even when she can achieve no long-term satisfaction from doing so—reveals her as a woman so angry at her own sentence of early death that she must take out her rage on

another, exerting what little power remains in her grip by threatening him too with death. Though her death appears an accident, she is still the type who might just wrap a telephone cord around her own neck in order to trap her prey from beyond the grave.

The intensity of Vera's inhumanity makes me wonder at times if perhaps she is not a fantasy projection out of the mind of a man trying to justify his part in her death. But whether her evil be real or imagined, this noir woman holds terrors that few horror women can exceed. Any one of us might meet up with Vera on that long highway, and we'd best make absolutely certain that we do not offer her a ride.

The Narrow Margin

by Marty Baumann

She could whittle any man down to size with one cutting glance of her sullen eyes. Hooded and glowering, they saw Marie Windsor through a catalogue of some of the finest B films ever produced. Few would argue that she'll survive film history as the definitive film noir dame, having appeared in some of the genre's finest offerings: *Double Deal*, *The Killing* and *Force of Evil*, to name a few.

Leaving her Utah origins behind, Marie found work in filmland as a model for pinup legend Alberto Varga and as a cigarette girl at The Mocambo, Hollywood's legendary watering hole. Spotted there by producer Arthur Hornblow, Jr., she landed her first film role and set about learning the filmic ropes in support of the major stars of the day. In 1952, Windsor landed a lead in what was to become one of filmdom's truly impeccable examples of film noir, *The Narrow Margin*. "My agent climbed through the window of the casting director's [office] with a test that I had made out at 20th Century-Fox," she recalls.

With her appearance in this seamless, crackling crime-drama, Windsor's well-earned image as the quintessentially sexy, tough broad took hold with permanence. Marie is indelible as a federally protected witness, enduring a harrowing train ride under the watch-

ful eye of dogged dick Charles MacGraw.

A great part of the film's success stems from the electric teaming of Windsor and the bristling tough guy. "He was a darling," she states without hesitation. Filmic sparks fly as the hard-



Marie Windsor landed a lead in one of filmdom's truly impeccable examples of film noir—*The Narrow Margin*.

bitten leads chew the scenery, swapping acid dialogue and darn-near coming to blows. Dark and sultry, the palpable fear Marie brings to the film is tempered by our admiration for the character's cynical tenacity. When a pivotal twist in the plot places Windsor squarely at the film's center, the story is transformed into something of a heroic tragedy as the true nature of her character is revealed. A dramatic sucker punch that makes the film memorable.

I for one was taken aback. I'd come to the film via its reputation, to study

She could whittle any man down to size with one cutting glance of her sullen eyes.

its shadows and the director's use of chiaroscuro to convey nihilism, recognizing the film as one of film noir's most substantive examples of dark cinema—or some such nonsense. Prepared to study its stagecraft with the same over-analytical approach employed by most reviewers of film noir, I was completely distracted from these cerebral pursuits by Marie's humanity. I found myself caring far more about the characters than about the shadows through which they moved. How was it possible to feel pity for a character who scorned you for doing so? How could those eyes project such an undeniable allure while simultaneously reminding me to keep my distance if I knew what was good for me?

At the time of her casting, Windsor knew little of Richard Fleischer, the young director helming the picture. "As I later figured out, I was lucky to have worked with him. I'm not too sure, but I think he would have preferred a big star in the role, which I certainly wasn't." Upon its release, the acknowledged crime-film classic garnered solid raves. "We certainly made a lot of noise with that picture. It ran with all the top pictures and we got all the reviews." The film survives as one of the very best B films ever made, due in great measure to the woman who crafted the flinty, tough-gal role into one against which all future molls and dames would be measured.

Misery

by Sandy Ahern

Like the mysterious force behind a storm, the first image of Kathy Bates' Annie Wilkes in *Misery* is that of a 180-pound woman doing the job a man of equal size equipped with the "jaws of life" might find difficult—doing so with seeming ease... just as she carries her cherished author up a snow bank with the same near effortlessness. What superhuman force lies behind her strength? The long-fabled adrenaline-rush so often attributed to times of crisis? Or, is it her desire to save *Misery*'s creator from certain death?

Annie's strength finds embryo in her nature much more frequently than those one-time miraculous events one reads about from time to time... she is mercurial, and her strength is as petulant and variable as a child's, or as mother nature's at her best, or worst, as the case may be. Contrast and change mark Annie as life-giving or life-threatening as the weather itself—and as unpredictable. Annie's vigor apparently finds birth, in this instance, in a marriage of the blizzard outside and the one within as she sees the plight of her favorite writer—and the opportunity said plight presents.

Her greeting—the soft, gentle, caring, professional manner—is as calming and well-groomed as her person. Discord mars the scene with her first lie, but her orderliness, intelligence and competence put one at ease—as they do the distraught, broken Paul Sheldon. Grasping for equilibrium, one assures oneself that her deceit is only that of an overzealous fan jealous of time with an idol. Literary criticism is at first gentle and chiding, but when Paul attempts a disclaimer, summer skies turn dark as Annie storms her first irrational tirade.

Her ability to bridle her tumultuous assaults and proceed, incongruously, with "I love you, Paul..." is still more frightening. Distorted perception follows distorted perception and, with the change in the weather, Annie reveals deeply personal aspects of her life to a complete stranger. Cut to a full moon and Annie reenters Paul's room storming out "you dirty bird" in passionate



Kathy Bates' performance is electrifying in its authenticity.

response to the demise of *Misery*; Paul has murdered his oldest friend. Her sacred sword falls: No one knows where he is. Paul exercises his considerable imagination and tries to escape. Annie exacts full retribution. After a murder, Paul tries entering her romantic delusions. Annie's affect has seesawed, and is doing so at increasingly frequent intervals. Faced with a mind that in quicksilver moments can equal or transcend his own, Paul sees another distortion: Annie's true genius is as intermittent and unpredictable as her psyche.

Stephen King has brilliantly magnified the terrors of reality within his fiction: This personality can—and does—exist. In the hidden chambers of every untreated manic-depressive lies the spawn of an Annie Wilkes. Kudos to King and to Rob Reiner who elicited this masterful performance. And Kathy Bates? Her performance is electrifying in its authenticity; the bipolar extremes are given life in her singular portrayal. Sensitive to the lunar cycle, bipolar women are more susceptible to the pendulum of their disorder than are men, and King has captured that magnificently. Suicide, not murder, is the more common tragedy of the disease; that may be because the more functional, artistic personalities have been studied for association... or, made public. Most of these individuals seem to



Annebelle (Carol Ohmart) almost admits to poisoning her husband (Vincent Price) years ago, and he admits to hating her with a passion.

internalize rather than externalize their psychoses; hence, suicide rather than murder? Or, is it that the arts offer a funnel of escape thereby diffusing externalized violence? King's genius is as instinctive as it is elemental—as his uncanny interpretation of Annie Wilkes (and so many others) has revealed. Perhaps he has consciously, or unconsciously, made this previously unexplored (or, at least, sparsely publicized?) connection. In any case, the fact that Annie Wilkes could be lying in wait next door, or worse still, dormant within, makes her the personification of the ultimate in dangerous dames!

House on Haunted Hill

by Gary J. Svehla

Generally, the screen's most dangerous dames belong to the world of film noir (Barbara Stanwyck, Lana

Turner, Lizabeth Scott, Jane Greer); however, the horror cinema also has had its fair share of despicable ladies (vampires and mad scientists alike, even daughters of Frankenstein and Dracula!). For me, the movie that instantly springs to my mind when I think of a dangerous dame is the noir/horror hybrid written by sharp-tongued Robb White, William Castle's *House on Haunted Hill*, released by Allied Artists in 1958.

Even though the movie was sold as a straight haunted house horror thriller, its roots are pure noir with a conniving millionaire, Frederick Loren (Vincent Price), hosting a house party where survivors who remain overnight receive \$10,000. Curiously, all the invited guests express desperate needs for quick cash. However, the conflict does not only originate from the obvious

"who will survive and who will not" question, the dramatic conflict instead comes from the unhappily married hosting couple, Mr. and Mrs. Loren (Carol Ohmart). She almost admits to poisoning her husband years ago, and he admits to hating her with a passion. As their under-control but venomous barbs go flying up in their bedroom as the nervous guests gather down below, Frederick wishes for his wife to get dressed to greet their guests, but she refuses, forcing Frederick to venture on alone. She does make a belated appearance later. But as is apparent, she openly defies her husband's wishes and does as she pleases, when she wishes.

Interestingly enough, it is slowly revealed that Annebelle Loren's secret lover, Dr. David Trent (Alan Marshal), is one of the invited party guests, and that Mrs. Loren has concocted a bold



A woman who is evil and plots murder is one thing, involving the lives of innocent bystanders is quite another.

scheme whereby all the spooky goings-on will unbalance the mind of pretty but naive Nora Manning (Carolyn Craig) so that Manning will accidentally shoot and kill Frederick, in a well-staged course of events intended to drive the young heroine off the deep end (a chandelier falls near her, she gets trapped in a dark room, she is spooked by an elderly blind woman in the same room, she witnesses the suicide of Mrs. Loren [by hanging] yet watches her ghostly form return, floating in space with a rope slowly wrapping itself around her feet, etc.).

However, the even more sinister and corrupt Frederick Loren is able to anticipate all these moves, and while the innocent yet manipulated Nora does in fact shoot the startled Mr. Loren, her gun is filled with blanks. When Dr. Trent enters to dispose of the body by throwing it in the convenient acid bath in the cellar, Loren surprises and overpowers him, tossing him into the vat instead. Then using devious means to horrify (and kill) his own wife, Loren has manipulated a skeleton marionette which he uses to force his own wife to slowly back into the very same acid bath to meet her death. Disposing of the skeleton prop, the appropriately sad-faced host awaits the arrival of his party guests (who have temporarily been locked in a room upstairs), concocts a slightly altered story, and states he will gladly let the courts decide his fate.

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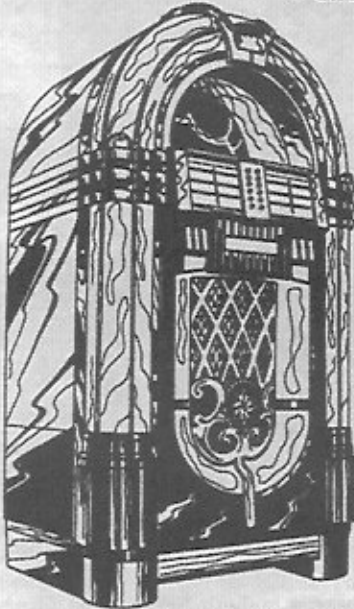
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True, this dangerous dame does get her comeuppance, but think of all the hell she caused for her party guests: staging her own death, cruelly putting innocent people into danger, forcing a young woman to seemingly commit murder and callously plotting the murder of her husband so she can be free to run off with her lover. All of this while making vile threats to her husband about both past and future attempts on his life. The hatred that exists between husband and wife is stated in both thinly veiled and verbally clever ways, yet the absolute hatred is clearly evident in the cleverly executed dialogue given the actors.

A woman who is evil and plots to murder the man she believes unfairly oppresses her is one thing, involving the lives of innocent bystanders and manipulating them to do her dirty work is quite another. Horror cinema has seldom created a female character as thoroughly evil as Annebelle Loren from *House on Haunted Hill*, and it is a credit to the keen imagination of Robb White that he was able to populate the creaking haunted house/ghost genre with a *femme fatale* straight out of the world of film noir.

FURRY TAILS CAN COME TRUE: 60 YEARS OF WEREWOLF FILMS



By Anthony Ambrogio

I begin with certain premises, which I trust this paper bears out.

The Premises

1. Out of the dozens of werewolf movies made, there are only three great ones: *The Wolf Man* (1941), *The Howling* (1981) and *Wolf* (1994).

This is not a bad record when you consider the following: (a) Excepting *Frankenstein* (1931), there haven't been any great *Frankenstein* films. (The too campy *Bride of Frankenstein* [1935], so highly touted by many, is a great horror film only for people who really don't like horror films.) (b) There has never yet been a completely satisfying *Dracula* film. Heck—there has never yet been a completely satisfying *vampire* film. (If that contention doesn't stir up a little controversy, I don't know what will.)

2. The themes of the great horror films are the same as those of all great literature: human procreation and mortality—sex and death. Sometimes sex and

death are one and the same. For the horror film protagonist, death is often the "consummation devoutly to be wished"—not *quietus* but *coitus* with a bare bodkin (or some other weapon)—the only satisfactory physical release possible for him.

3. R.H.W. Dillard's seminal essay, "Even a Man Who Is Pure at Heart: Poetry and Danger in the Horror Film" has established that the horror-film hero, particularly the werewolf, is a tragic figure in the Aristotelean sense: a fallible human whose fate inspires both pity and terror and whose demise offers the audience a catharsis.

4. Often, the monstrousness of horror film characters is a manifestation of their darker selves—frequently, their darker *sexual* selves—which they must confront and defeat or reintegrate. The sexuality that underscores so many horror films is part of the werewolf movie, though (until recently, anyway) usually less obvious than in vampire films.

5. The werewolf's "sexual" technique,

**Lon Chaney, Jr. as
Larry Talbot: "I
know you'll think
I'm crazy, but, in a
half an hour, the
moon will rise, and
I'll turn into a wolf."**

**Lou Costello as
Wilbur: "You and 20
million other guys."**

**—from *Abbott
and Costello Meet
Frankenstein*, truth
masquerading as
comedy.**



Save for the idea that a werewolf tries to destroy the thing it loves, *Werewolf of London* is a bloodless and uninteresting film. Pictured is Henry Hull.

unlike that of his more erotic, hemophagic counterpart, does away with the pretense of seduction and is more openly bloody and bestial. The violations are not as neat, and therefore not as attractive. This may explain why werewolf films are less numerous than vampire films.

6. But werewolves are cousins to cat-people, ape-people and the indeterminate-species-people of the many versions of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Taken together, these films form a large body of work which explores various aspects of the sexuality and mortality of metamorphosis. If we consider werewolf movies as a subspecies of the man-into-animal metamorphosis film, a type of story whose mythological roots go back at least as far as the story of Eros and Psyche, werewolf movies are probably more numerous than vampire films.

7. Although the horror film is largely a male sphere, women are central to it. And the role of women in werewolf films, as in other horror-film subgenres, has steadily increased in importance.



Werewolf of London came at the tail end (sorry about that) of the first horror cycle. Like other horror films of the time, it couldn't decide whether it was about science or the supernatural.

The Original

The history of werewolf movies as we know it begins in 1935, with *Werewolf of London*, but that film doesn't fit well into the werewolf film subgenre, partly because it's so completely overshadowed by Universal's definitive *The Wolf Man*, partly because its director and star (Stuart Walker and Henry Hull) were not "horror people" (we would regard it differently had it starred Karloff, as initially announced in 1933) and mostly because its protagonist doesn't quite fit the tormented hero mold.

Werewolf of London came at the tail end (sorry about that) of the first horror cycle. Like other horror films of the time, it couldn't decide whether it was about science or the supernatural.

(American films' resistance to the "unrealistic," the tendency to "logically" explain away seemingly incredible events, was still very much prevalent then.) In any case, rheostats and laboratories seemed to be the paraphernalia of horror films, almost no matter what the subject. So Henry Hull's Dr. Wilfred Glendon was a scientist, but not exactly mad, like Henry Frankenstein, nor even misguided, like Henry Jekyll—though his human self is pretty prissy and constipated, making a proper contrast to his bestial half.

His obsession is not to learn the secrets of life and death (*Frankenstein*) nor to separate the dual nature of man (*Jekyll and Hyde*) but to find a night-blooming flower, the *mariphasa lumina lupina*, "the phosphorescent wolf flower

that blooms under the rays of the moon," so his experiment is not immediately related to the sexual tensions between man and woman (unlike the other two films). Most certainly, he is guilty of neglect. His quest takes him to Tibet; he leaves his wife, Lisa (Valerie Hobson), to wither away in London. While in the Himalayas, he is attacked and bitten by a wolf—a werewolf.

This plot device established the standard method for becoming a werewolf. It reveals, once again, American movies' intolerance toward things totally supernatural. One might consider this plot device an allusion to the contagion aspect of the vampire legend (that those bitten by vampires become vampires themselves—ironically, an



attribute largely ignored by vampire movies until the sixties), but the idea is more rationalistic: It mimics the etiology of hydrophobia. Just as the bite of a rabid animal infects a human with the same disease, so, too, does the bite of a werewolf. (Ironically, contagion is not a tenet of werewolf folk legend, according to which people become werewolves through black arts.) A rabies vaccine had been developed 50 years before, but Hollywood chose to ignore medical history and make "werewolfery" incurable.

There is an antidote, however, around which some of the dramatic conflict turns. It turns out to be the *mariphasa*, the very flower Dr. Glendon sought—as did the werewolf; that's what brought them together in Tibet. Ironically, Glendon's search for the plant leads to his infection, and then the plant is his only counteractant for the infection. So he becomes more obsessed with it and further neglects his wife.

Dr. Yogami (Warner Oland), the other werewolf, the one who bit Glendon, tells him about the antidote

(he wants it for himself, but there's not enough to go around), and—perhaps speaking from bitter experience—warns him that "the werewolf instinctively seeks to kill the thing it loves best." In the end, he manages to beat Glendon to the single bloom—only to seal his doom because, although the *mariphasa* stops Yogami from metamorphosing, he's then powerless to stop Glendon (who cannot prevent his own transformation) from killing him.

Sure enough, Dr. Glendon as wolf seeks out the thing he loves most—Lisa, who's been seeking out the company of her former beau, Paul Ames (Lester Matthews). Although Glendon didn't or couldn't show his love while in human form, as a wolf, he displays a violent passion for Lisa, but a policeman's non-silver bullet interrupts his coitus and brings him quietus. Dying, he has time to utter, "Thanks for the bullet. It was the only way."

Save for the idea that a werewolf tries to destroy the thing it loves, *Werewolf of London* is a bloodless and uninteresting film, distinguished only by its miscasting and miscues. There is too much "comedy relief"—mostly in the person of fluttery Etta Coombs (Spring Byington) and also from a couple of drunken Cockney landladies (Zeffie Tilbury and Ethel Griffies) who rent Glendon a room and then peep through the keyhole and witness one of his transformations. And there is not enough in Glendon's person or Henry Hull's personality to engage us. Warner Oland's Dr. Yogami is the best thing in the movie (probably because he reminds us of Charlie Chan).

The Masterpiece

Perhaps Universal learned from its mistakes or—more probably—just lucked out six years later when it made *The Wolf Man*. Its choice of writer, director and performer were all superior to *Werewolf*. Curt Siodmak had an instinctive feel for the material; as he was fond of telling anybody later, he invented most of what has become standard werewolf-movie myth. George Waggner must have put everything he had into this picture because the dozens of other B-films he directed were



Talbot does come from noble stock; his father is Sir John Talbot (Claude Rains), fifth-generation master of Talbot Castle, but Larry (Lon Chaney, Jr.) has been separated from his father and his ancestral estate for 18 years.

nondescript. Lon Chaney, Jr. was never as intelligent an actor as Henry Hull, but, when it came to playing a likable brute or average joe (as in *Of Mice and Men* [1939], *Man Made Monster* [1940] or the *Wolf Man* films), he was infinitely more suited to the role.

And this is important. Hull's Glendon was a doctor, a member of the upper class. But the werewolf isn't an upper-class monster. It's no articulate, sadistic Mr. Hyde; it's a snarling beast. Werewolves exhibit more elemental passions—the passions of the masses with their super-ego down. If *Dracula* is an aristocrat and *Frankenstein's monster* a peasant or a slave, the werewolf is a working-class monster (although he's become somewhat more upwardly mobile recently, just as many Ameri-

cans have graduated from working- to middle class). In this respect, Lawrence Talbot, as written by Siodmak and portrayed by Chaney, makes a much better victim of lycanthropy than any Dr. Glendon.

Talbot does come from noble stock; his father is Sir John Talbot (Claude Rains), fifth-generation master of Talbot Castle, but Larry has been separated from his father and his ancestral estate for 18 years, during which time he lived in America, working at various odd jobs as a skilled tradesman. He's only come home now because of the death of his older brother, John, killed in an unspecified hunting accident.

The Wolf Man is a multi-layered, many-faceted film that deals with the

relationship of man and beast, man and woman and parents and children. It's a measure of the film's subtlety and complexity that this hunting incident isn't described in greater detail, when it obviously bears enormous weight on the story and characters. Sir John clearly feels responsible for his first son's death (because he caused it?) and is determined not to repeat the same mistakes with his second son. Of course, he does. Because his rationalistic mind refuses to accept Larry's supernatural explanation, he ends up clubbing his werewolf son to death in another hunting accident, inadvertently bringing Larry the peace he seeks while doubling his own pain at the loss of another child. (Grief kills Sir John shortly after Larry's death, between pictures, as we learn in the se-



The Wolf Man is the story of a figurative wolf who becomes a literal one. Pictured are Chaney, Jr. and Evelyn Ankers.

quel, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* [1943].)

The absence of a mother or female presence at Talbot Castle makes the part of the gypsy woman Maleva (Maria Ouspenskaya) all the more critical. She fulfills a role in Larry's life that his father cannot or will not. As she cared for her son, Bela the werewolf (Bela Lugosi), so she cares for this "adopted" son, inheritor of Bela's curse and liberator of Bela's soul. She, not Sir John, eases Larry's suffering through her magic (not scientific) ministrations—once even briefly reversing the wolfish effects of his lycanthropy. (Her role as protector is greater in the sequel, wherein Larry seeks her out and she agrees to take him to Dr. Frankenstein, in search of a cure.)

The Wolf Man is the story of a figurative wolf who becomes a literal one. The famous verse, coined by Curt Siodmak, and repeated at least three times here, claims that "Even a man who is pure in heart / And says his prayers by night / May become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms / And the

autumn moon is bright." The best screen werewolves aren't so pure in heart, though. Their punishments may not fit their crimes, but (like Oedipus) they're not guiltless. Larry Talbot's aorta is not lily white; at best, he shares the same kind of lust in his heart as Jimmy Carter. At worst—well...

After spying on Gwen Conliff (Evelyn Ankers) through her bedroom window, Larry goes to her father's shop to put the make on her. This is where he buys the silver-wolfhead cane that figures so prominently in the two werewolves' deaths. He tells her what blue eyes she has, then—after she explains about werewolves—jokingly amends it to what *big eyes* she has. She reminds him that "Little Red Riding Hood" was a werewolf story (as—in case there were any doubts—*Company of Wolves* [1985] makes clear later).

Apparently attracted by Larry's animal magnetism, Gwen does go out with him, even though she's betrothed to another: Frank Andrews (Patric Knowles), the Talbots' gamekeeper (n.b.). She takes her friend, Jenny Wil-

liams (Fay Helm), along as a "chaperone," but they leave Jenny to get her fortune read and walk in the woods by themselves. Larry never gets to first base with Gwen, however, because, every time he tries to kiss her, they're interrupted—here, by a scream.

A wolf attacks Jenny; Larry runs to her rescue—too late—and earns his werewolf wound while killing the wolf (Bela). Next day, the whole town's speculating about what Larry and Gwen did out in the woods (especially Mrs. Williams, who finds time, in her grief, to heap outraged blame on the pair). That night, Larry meets Gwen at the Gypsy fair and gets her alone again. He gives her the charm Maleva gave him as protection from the werewolf curse: "I won't need this"—that's what *he* thinks—"I want you to have it. It'll protect you." "Protect me? From whom?" "Me. Just in case." Obviously, Larry instinctively knows what the werewolf always goes after. (Of course, it doesn't protect Gwen; when Larry, as the Wolf Man, meets her in the woods the following night, he attacks her anyway.) Anyway, before he can kiss her this time, they're interrupted by the Gypsies who are fleeing because "there's a werewolf in camp!"

On the third night, when Larry-as-wolf decides to "go all the way" with Gwen, he's interrupted by his father, who clubs him to death with his silver cane (the phallic and Oedipal significance of which Leonard Heldreth handles smartly in his article, "The Beast Within";² I wish I'd said all that stuff first).

The Sequels

The Wolf Man is a fast-paced, fast-moving thriller. Note that there is no full-moon business here—a bit of lore introduced in *Werewolf of London* apparently to account for the slow-growing flowers essential to its plot. Here "the autumn moon" causes the transformation, so Larry doesn't have to wait around a month before the wolf comes out in him. *The Wolf Man*'s unity of action (no comic relief to speak of except for Constable Ralph Bellamy's squeamish assistant), unity of place (Talbot Castle, the village and espe-

cially the woods between) and unity of time (it's all over in three days—and 70 minutes of screen time) increase its classical-tragic structure, something not present in the sequels, all featuring Lon Chaney, Jr., which have their own charms and attractions but increasingly ignore Larry's sexually tragic side, substituting instead the easily recognizable pathetic character for whom we can all feel sorry and who longs for death and now only changes every 30 days so that he can be a nominal good guy otherwise and become a wolf only when it's time to fight the Frankenstein monster or cause some other diversion.

Larry Talbot looks for Frankenstein's *Secrets of Life and Death* in hope of finding a way to end his cursed existence (*Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*) and later throws himself off a cliff for the same reason (*House of Dracula* [1945]). These are noble gestures, but, the trouble with werewolves like Talbot is that none of them, in their lucid, human moments, ever seriously consider the simple expedient of taking their own life with a well-placed silver bullet.

That's probably because this solution falls under the heading of self-abuse—a sort of masturbatory, onanistic act that must be avoided. The werewolf's demise has to be accomplished through "straight sex" (cf. the Beauty-and-the-Beast story). Indeed, in *House of Frankenstein* (1944), Larry Talbot tells Ilonka (Elena Verdugo), the Gypsy with whom he's fallen in love, that a werewolf can only find rest if he's killed by a silver bullet "fired by the hand of someone who loves him enough to understand." (That apparently doesn't include the werewolf himself, who must be too full of self-loathing.) So Ilonka gives of herself and lovingly prepares a silver bullet, which she pumps into the Wolf Man when he (instinctively seeking to kill the thing he loves) attacks her. They lie together in death, their "consummation devoutly wished" achieved at last.

The Last Classic Werewolf

You can't have a horror classic without a Hammer remake—though not all Hammer remakes are classics.



The Curse of the Werewolf (1961) shows the triumph of environment over heredity; the power of love finally wins out. Pictured is Oliver Reed.

The Curse of the Werewolf (1961) shows the triumph of environment over heredity; the power of love finally wins out. It examines a born werewolf, offspring of the rape of a mute servant girl by a mistreated peasant (Richard Wordsworth). An evil marquis (Anthony Dawson) has kept the peasant caged like a dog for so many years that the fellow is now more beast than man. And the marquis throws the poor girl to the madman to punish her for spurning the noble's ignoble advances. The peasant dies of sexual exertion, the marquis dies at the mute girl's hand and she dies in childbirth.

Her baby is born on Christmas Day—a bad omen, since the folk belief is that, ever since 1 A.D., any child who has the audacity to be born on December 25 must be some kind of anti-Christ. When the holy water boils in the bap-

tismal font on little Leon's christening day, it seems as if the poor little bastard is in for a hard time. Sure enough, a lot of sheep start dying when the boy becomes a lad, but his adoptive father stops that by giving him love and religion and the proper environment.

However, when Leon grows up (into Oliver Reed), he leaves the care of his foster home and journeys to the big bad city where, under the influence of drink and the unhealthy atmosphere of a brothel, he succumbs to the beast within when faced with the charms of the full moon and a full-breasted lady of the evening. The love of a pure full-breasted woman (this is a Hammer film, after all—all the women are full breasted) almost frees him, but the law separates them, and the beast comes out in him again. His adoptive father confronts Leon in a church belfry, and—



John Landis rehashed *The Wolf Man* in flashy contemporary dress as *American Werewolf in London*.

even in his lupine form, Leon's humanity shows through: He asks his father to end his suffering with a silver bullet.

The Werewolf in Limbo

After *Curse*, filmmakers didn't know what to do with the werewolf concept, except to rehash old ideas and try to make them fresh. So we got werewolf "problem" films, like *The Boy Who Cried Werewolf* (1973), about a kid's dilemma when he finds out his dad has become a werewolf; werewolf political satires, like *The Werewolf of Washington* (1972); and werewolf mysteries, like *The Beast Must Die* (1976), not a whodunit but a *who-metamorphosed*. All three of these films contained good ideas; would that the films themselves had been better executed.

The "Year of the Werewolf": How Not to Make a Werewolf Movie

Then came 1981. John Landis rehashed *The Wolf Man* in flashy contemporary dress as *American Werewolf in London*, an entertaining film (especially if you see it after *Legend of the Werewolf* [1975]—an unpalatable rehash of *Curse of the Werewolf*) but a good example of how not to make a werewolf movie.

Like *Bride of Frankenstein*, *American Werewolf* is a horror movie for people who don't like horror movies. Horror films can be intentionally funny (some of the best are), but they must take themselves seriously. *American Werewolf* doesn't take itself seriously; it winks at us. And much of its humor is out of place. For example, what's the point of the slapstick splatter car crashes

that intrude at the end? Leftovers from Landis' *Blues Brothers*?

The film retains some cherished Hollywood tenets of lycanthropy, like the full moon (mostly so Landis can use "Blue Moon" and "Bad Moon Rising" to good effect on the soundtrack), flip-pantly rejects others (David the werewolf [David Naughton] asks his dead friend, Jack [Griffin Dunne], if it takes a silver bullet to kill him; Jack replies, "Get serious"), and adds some unnecessary myths of its own.

According to the movie, a werewolf's victims continue to roam the Earth as rotting corpses until "the last of the line" is destroyed—a ridiculous means of personifying the werewolf's tormented conscience. Landis can't let David convey his inner pain; he must have him express it in dialogues with his dead friend. Perhaps Landis felt it was a hip expository device and eliminated the need for any tried-and-trite Gypsy woman, but it's a dumb idea, as anybody can figure: I don't mean to get "rationalistic" on you, but such a thing would result in thousands of victims wandering the Earth if they can't find rest until "the last of the line" dies.

Finally, *American Werewolf* fails as a horror film because Landis makes David a totally arbitrary victim of lycanthropy, unlike Talbot or even Glendon. And it fails to do anything with the important relationship between David and Alex (Jenny Agutter), the nurse who becomes his lover. One night in bed, when he worries about becoming a werewolf, they discuss lycanthropy, alluding to *The Wolf Man* and *The Curse of the Werewolf*. He tells her that he believes a werewolf can only be killed by someone who loves him—foreshadowing if I ever heard it. But Landis backs off from any such romantic, dramatically logical conclusion. In the end, the cars crash; David the wolf is cornered in an alley; Jenny arrives in time to see a bunch of bobbies shoot him; and the Marceles' "Blue Moon" plays over the credits. The end. Like I said, a horror movie for people who don't like horror movies.

American Werewolf has good special effects, but so does *The Howling* (on half the budget), and *The Howling*



Bill (Christopher Stone) meets Marsha in the woods for a tryst by campfire light that Dante, in *The Howling*, begins as a romantic idyll but transforms—along with his characters—into an animalistic grope.

has a better script, funnier jokes and a greater respect for its genre.

The "Year of the Werewolf": The Ultimate Werewolf Movie

First off, *The Howling* is so good because it's a fine piece of movie-making. Joe Dante learned his craft by editing trailers for Roger Corman, and the expertise he gained shows in the film's pacing. In its first 10 minutes, while we follow a reporter who's set herself up as a decoy, Dante introduces us to more than a half-dozen important characters. Each one is differentiated from the rest, and none of the necessary exposition impedes the action. Ten minutes later, the scene shifts to the Colony, a resort-cum-clinic in the California hills, and Dante introduces more characters, more exposition and still moves the plot along. (Of course, it doesn't hurt that he's working from a first-rate script by John Sayles.)

Though *The Howling* abounds with cinematic allusions, the only Hollywood werewolf lore it retains is the fiction that the bite of a werewolf infects a surviving victim with the disease. In *The Howling*, people actually *choose* to be werewolves, and they change shape as they see fit, not by the light of the silvery moon. *The Howling* is the first werewolf movie to show werewolves as the vicious beasts they are. The film is very much about the struggle between humankind's better and darker sides, as the heroine makes clear in her final monologue.

The Howling, which begins and ends with a video image, is a film about the interpretation of life and "art"—the thin, blurred line between what's real and what's TV—about seeing and believing. The movie starts with media person Karen White (Dee Wallace), someone who reports the news and brings "real life" into people's living

rooms, participating in a news event, becoming news by decoying killer Eddie Quist (Robert Picardo), who's enamored of her because of her TV personality. They meet in a porno-film peep-show booth, where he makes her watch a bondage-rape loop while telling her how the people in the film are not real, unlike him, and didn't feel a thing. "But you're different. I watch you on TV," he says, then claims he's going to light up her whole body.

His off-screen transformation occurs in this sleazy atmosphere, linking from the outset lycanthropy and perverted, brutal sex. Later, when she tries to report the event on camera, she's stopped by the sight of the porn-film image in the camera lens ("the symbolic highpoint of the film as well as its message," says Bruce Kavin).³ Still later, in one of her recurring nightmares, Karen sees *herself* as the bound woman in the film. And, in the end, she brings



The Howling's many allusions are not merely in-jokes or homages. Dante and scenarist John Sayles use film lore as a thematic basis for their story.

the image to TV, when she goes through with her second "eye-witness" account and transforms on camera to show everybody the truth before she's shot with a silver bullet by her friend Chris (Dennis Dugan)—one who loves enough to understand. Whether her sacrifice is effective is left in question by the responses of the people who see the broadcast.

The Howling's many allusions (mostly to other werewolf films) are not merely in-jokes or homages. Dante and scenarist John Sayles use film lore as a thematic basis for their story. For example, practically everybody in the film is named after the director of a werewolf movie. This subtle touch is appropriate for a cast of characters who are playing out a lupine drama but remain sometimes unaware of the lessons of the cinema.

The interrelation of life and the movies is important but often overlooked. Chris and Terry Fisher (Belinda Belaski) are watching *The Wolf Man* on TV when Karen calls with the news that her husband Bill (R. William Neill, played by Christopher Stone) has been

attacked by a wolf; the real-life events echo the cinematic ones, with the same consequences. And the brave Terry is murdered by werewolf Eddie while Chris hears her screams over the phone as his TV plays a cartoon about a wolf capturing a lamb. The movie ends—after Karen's transformation and euthanasia, after Marsha the werewolf (Elizabeth Brooks) escapes, after the credits roll, with a final clip from *The Wolf Man*: Maleva gives Larry the amulet and tells him, "Go now, and may heaven help you." Joe Dante sends the viewer away with the same advice.

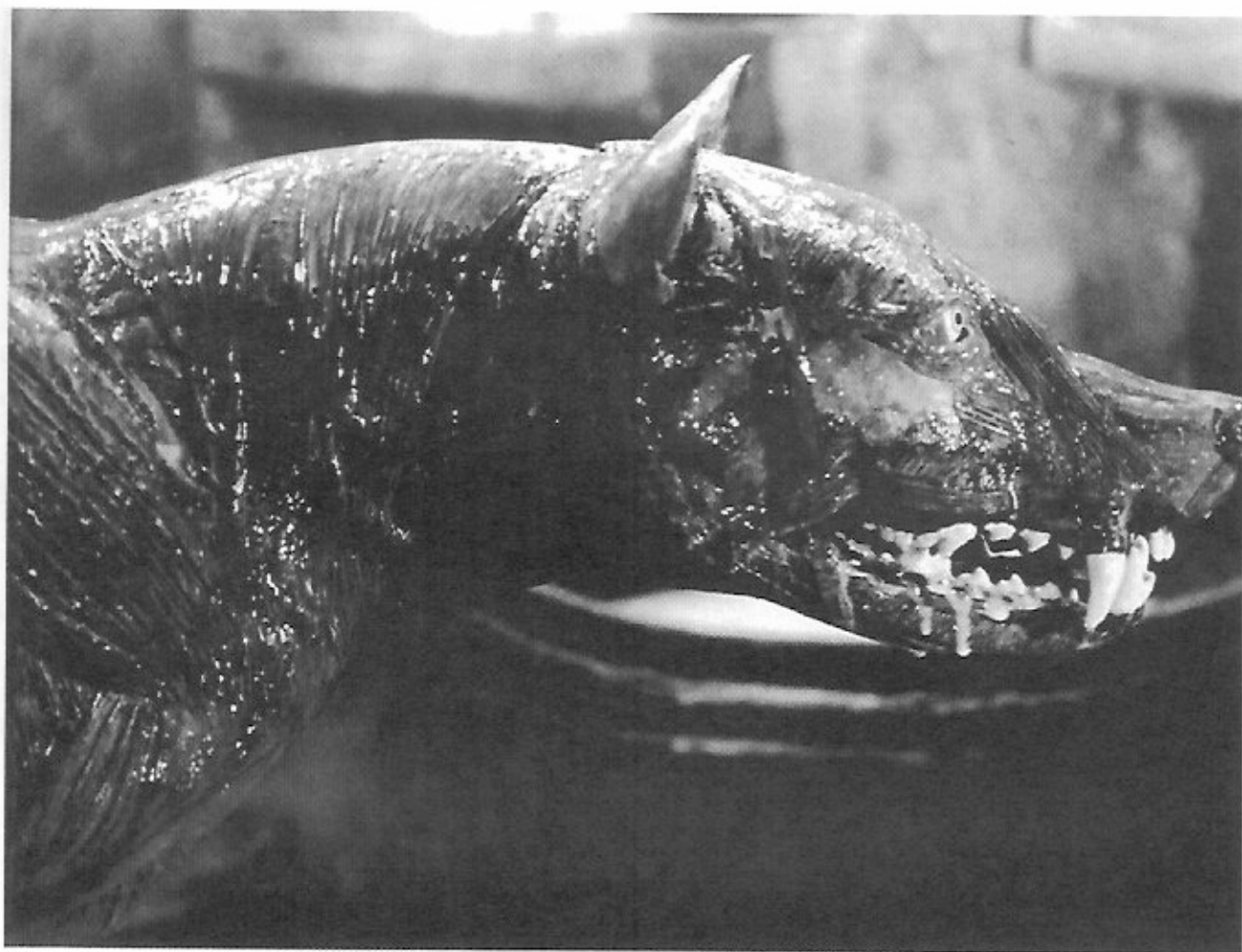
The psychology of the werewolf is explored from many points of view in *The Howling* because there are so many werewolves in the film. Eddie Quist and his family are dyed-in-the-wool werewolves, who wallow in their power. Psychiatrist George Wagner (Patrick MacNee) specializes in werewolf case work (apparently with some success; an autographed photo of Lon Chaney, Jr. [Larry Talbot?] sits on his desk). He does talk shows and spouts learnedly about getting in touch with one's primal self. In the end, we learn

that, like his hairy patients at the Colony, he too has been "blessed" with the "gift" (his term, and the title of his pop-psych best-seller); that's apparently what got him started in his werewolf practice. But he's obviously regarded it as a curse, having been able by great force of will never to give in to his animal side (we never see him change: "He's so repressed," says Eddie), and he is relieved to receive a silver bullet from Chris.

The other werewolves are a mixed lot, with one thing in common—their viciousness, which Wagner has somehow kept in check, but which wins out in the end. "Raisin' cattle for our feed! It ain't natural!... Humans are our cattle... Yuh can't tame whut's meant t' be wild, doc," says Erle Kenton (John Carradine) when the werewolves gang up on Wagner and decide to quit therapy.

Bill is the werewolf most close to the traditional one of the innocent (or almost innocent) victim. Having spurned the aggressive Marsha's sexual advances, he is attacked in the woods by a wolf (ha-ha) and soon overcome by the bestial side of his nature. Once bitten, he's not shy; he meets Marsha in the woods for a tryst by campfire light that Dante begins as a romantic idyll but transforms—along with his characters—into an animalistic grope. Needless to say, Bill's relationship with his wife deteriorates (we see him reading the doubly significant *You Can't Go Home Again* by Thomas Wolfe); he even strikes her, then, in an awkward attempt at apology, tells her, "You don't know what it's like." She replies, "I don't want to know." But she gets to find out later, when—escaping from the werewolves—she is bitten by one, whom she kills, and who turns out to be her husband, who'd instinctively sought to kill the one he loved best.

When Karen transforms, her werewolf self is not like the others; it's puppy-cute, with a quivering nose. At first glance, this seems like a misstep, an inadvertent laugh-getter, but it illustrates (as does the end of *Curse of the Werewolf*) the triumph of the human over the animal (cf. *Wolf*).



Company deals, from the female perspective, with adolescent fears and curiosity about sex, all exemplified by werewolves.

The Wifewolf

As did *The Howling*, *Company of Wolves* (1985) broke new ground in werewolf cinema. It's the first werewolf film with a feminine sensibility. Co-scripted by a woman, writer Angela Carter, from her story, its landscape is no male sphere but the fertile imagination of a teenage girl. The bulk of the film takes place in the fairy-tale forest of her dreams. It is framed by her dreaming, and there are dreams and stories within this dream.

Company deals, from the female perspective, with adolescent fears and curiosity about sex, all exemplified by werewolves. "The worst wolves are hairy on the inside," Grandma (Angela Lansbury) tells Rosaleen (Sarah Patterson). She relates the tale of a young bride who remarries after her husband disappears on their wedding night (taken by wolves, she thinks). He

turns up years later, turns into an angry wolf because she didn't wait for him, and loses his head when her present husband saves her (only to strike her because she marvels at her first husband's handsome face in death). The similarity of Grandma's death (a werewolf knocks her head off, and the decapitation is filmed in the same slow-motion setup) plus other subtle hints strongly suggest that the story she related was not a fable but her own history (which would explain her attitude toward men and sex).

Rosaleen's mother is of a different opinion: "If there is a beast in man, it meets its match in woman," she tells her daughter when Rosaleen asks if sex hurts. And the girl, by her actions, seems to prove the truth of her mother's assertion when, in the Red Riding Hood portion of the story, she fends off the Huntsman (Mischa Bergese), who's

actually the big bad wolf who ate Grandma. Further, she freely decides to join him in his wolfish existence and becomes a wolf too. (Just in time, the mother prevents the father [David Warner] from shooting this "wolf.") They run off together.

But director and co-scripter Neil Jordan couldn't let the story end there (where Carter's story actually ends). He had to take it out of the dream and back to waking life. This would be fine if something learned during sleep were applied to waking. Instead, the dream becomes a nightmare, with the wolf pack overrunning the house and the girl, while the narrator on the soundtrack quotes Charles Perrault's cautionary "Sweetest smile hides sharpest tooth," which seems to belie much of what went before.

The ending magnifies *Company's* flaw, a confusion of outlook, and makes



Jack Nicholson's hirsute makeup (by Rick Baker) seems to be a nod to Henry Hull's *Werewolf of London*.

one wonder whether there is any thematic consistency to its various stories, any overall coherence to the film or if it's just a series of very stylish but ultimately unrelated vignettes.

Taking the Werewolf to Its Logical Conclusion

The commercial success of Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) paved the way for other big-budget returns of famous monsters: Frankenstein's in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1993), Mr. Hyde in *Mary Reilly* (1995) and the mad scientist and his manimals in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996)—although none garnered the kind of box-office returns that *Dracula* did. Neither did Mike Nichols' *Wolf* (1994), a nineties retelling of the Wolf Man story—although it was the best film of this entire group.

In *Wolf*, that wolfish existence is shown to be the complement to one's human nature. Will Randall (Jack Nicholson), a nice guy who's being eaten alive by the wolves in the publishing world, gets bitten by a wolf and suddenly finds it within himself to withstand and stand up to those people who were out to get him. Unlike in *The Howling*, lycanthropy actually does become a kind of gift (although, to keep the viewer worried, Will voices the fear that his gift might come at some kind of price, and the movie keeps us—and him—uncertain as to whether he as a wolf might be responsible for his estranged wife's death). But the decent man remains decent—ironically retains his humanity even as he becomes a wolf—while at the same time he gains a certain inner strength and insight (not to mention renewed sexual prowess,

increased physical powers and heightened senses).

Wolf has many of the traditional werewolf movie trappings: the wolf bite that transmits the curse/gift of lycanthropy to another; the amulet-charm that can prevent the transformation from occurring; the protagonist's plea (to "one who loves him enough to understand") that he be locked up at night for his own good, so he won't attack his loved one. But then *Wolf* stands these conventions on their head—the hero must rip off the metamorphosis-resistant amulet and break out of his cage in order to rescue his loved one from the attack of another werewolf (one who retains all the evil traits and intent of his human persona).

Note that, despite Randall's professional status as a senior editor for a New York publishing house, in a conscious (unconscious?) nod to Larry Talbot, he sports a proletarian work shirt and pants when he lopes around wolfishly. Nicholson's hirsute makeup (by Rick Baker, who did the makeup effects for *American Werewolf in London*), on the other hand, seems to be a nod to Henry Hull's *Werewolf of London*.

Like *Company of Wolves*, *Wolf* also deals with a woman who embraces the wolf lifestyle and ultimately decides to join a man in his wolfish existence. *Wolf* is the first werewolf film to have an entirely happy ending, wherein the couple are united as wolves (and it doesn't turn out to be a shattered dream, à la *Company of Wolves*).

The Post-Modern Werewolf

The long-awaited (by some) sequel to *American Werewolf in London*, *An American Werewolf in Paris*, finally premiered in December 1997. It also has a happy ending, wherein the couple is cured of lycanthropy and united in marriage (and bungee jumping).

However, if the superior *Wolf* couldn't spark a revival in werewolf movies, I doubt that this mélange of ideas from various other hirsute epics will. There are too many ideas in *Paris*, and too many of those are underdeveloped.

When the title character, Andy (Tom Everett Scott), becomes infected with the werewolf virus, he develops

TOM EVERETT SCOTT
JULIE DELPY

An American Werewolf in Paris

Three young college graduates on a "Daredevil Tour of Europe" hit Paris seeking some serious fun. Along the way, Andy meets the woman of his dreams, the beautiful and mysterious Serafine. The only problem is, when the moon is full, his dream girl turns into the stuff of which nightmares are made.

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HOLLYWOOD PICTURES PRESENTS
AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN PARIS
A FILM BY ANTHONY WALLER
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COSTUME DESIGNER JANE BARNES
PRODUCTION DESIGNER JOHN JAMES
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JIM WENGER & JIM WENGER
PRODUCED BY RICHARD CLAUSS
SCREENPLAY BY JOHN SAYLES
DIRECTED BY ANTHONY WALLER
CASTING BY JUDITH HARRIS
COSTUME DESIGNER JANE BARNES
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heightened senses (à la *Wolf*). The movie features many werewolves and depicts them as a vicious race (à la *The Howling*). They prey off the weak, the homeless, the disposable—the American tourist. (Compare *Wolfen* [1981], although the werewolves' method of luring victims to a fake nightclub is lifted from *From Dusk Till Dawn* [1996], which lifted it from *Vamp* [1986].) There's a formula that can prevent transformations—or accelerate them (a nod to *Werewolf of London*?). The stupid idea of the werewolf's victims "haunting" the lycanthrope in his non-wolf form is retained from *American Werewolf in London*, though it's applied arbitrarily and haphazardly: We never see the French *loup-garoux*'s hundreds of victims haunting them. Only the American is bothered. (As much as I hate the concept, I have to admit that Julie Bowen, as Amy, Andy's female victim, at least lends some life to the film—both before and after she's dead.) The film does add an "original" idea of its own to werewolf lore: Your lycanthropy can be cured if you kill and then eat the heart of the werewolf whose bite transformed you. It's a *dumb* idea, but it's original.

The idea of a young woman as werewolf is okay (and Julie Delpy is good as Serafine)—although, if she's supposed to be the daughter of Jenny Agutter and David Naughton from the first film, as producer Richard Claus claimed,⁴ that idea seems to have been lost in the translation or on the cutting-room floor. But the picture isn't satisfied to deal with the ramifications of a single distaff monster; it needs an American male werewolf to justify its title, and then it throws in all those other werewolves to hedge its bets—and loses.

If director Anthony Waller and his co-scripter were as good as Joe Dante and John Sayles, *maybe* they could have made a fine stew out of these diverse ingredients. But they're not, and they don't. (Caroline Vié reports that "Christopher McQuarrie, the Academy Award-winning screenwriter of *The Usual Suspects*, was called in later to polish the dialogue and give it a more 'American' ring"⁵—which just goes to show that one successful script does not a scriptwriter make.) The movie can't decide if it wants to be a comedy or a horror film or an action thriller. It probably should have opted for the last:

Waller, who distinguished himself with *Mute Witness* (1995), does put together some exciting, well-played action sequences, such as when Andy's friend escapes an attack from a hospital-bed-bound werewolf, but these moments get lost amid the junk—and the makeup effects are not impressive; the film features some of the least satisfying werewolves ever.

**Lame Conclusion, or
"This is the Way My
Essay Ends:
Not with a Howl(ing)
but a Whimper"**

The *Wolf Man* was always my favorite famous monster. My disappointment over the most recent addition to the lycanthropic canon

only makes me appreciate the great werewolf films that much more, and—ever the optimist—I take heart in the fact that, as sure as the moon waxes and wanes, eventually we'll see more werewolf movies, and, once in a blue moon, one of them will measure up to *The Wolf Man*, *The Howling* or *Wolf*.

Notes

¹ First published by Louisiana State University Press (Baton Rouge: 1967), in *Man and the Movies*, ed. W.R. Robinson. A paperback edition of *Man and the Movies* was published by Penguin Books in 1969, and Dillard's essay has been several times reprinted—in abridged form as "The Paganry of Death" in *Focus on the Horror Film*, eds. Roy Huss and T. J. Ross (Prentice-Hall, Inc.: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1972) and as part of Dillard's own book, *Horror Films* (New York: Monarch, 1976).

² 1986. An article that, to my knowledge, was never published—more's the pity.

³ See Kavin's incisive analytic review in *Film Quarterly*, 35, 1 (Fall, 1981), pp. 25-31.

⁴ "Paris' When It Screams," *Fangoria* 167 (October, 1997) p. 20.

⁵ "A Director from London, a Werewolf from Paris," *Fangoria* 168 (November, 1997), p. 49.

KHARIS— UNIVERSAL'S SECOND STRINGER

by Steven Thornton

In Universal's mythical pantheon of classic monsters, a discernible hierarchy can be observed. At the highest level stand Dracula and the Frankenstein Monster, twin doppelgangers of death and immortality, who forever reign as popular and critical favorites. Slightly below but still commanding a respectful following is Larry Talbot's long-suffering lycanthrope, the Wolf Man. The Phantom of the Opera (with a little help from Andrew Lloyd Webber) has gained a renewed respect among lovers of tragic romance, while the Creature from the Black Lagoon is a perennial favorite among lovers of 1950s cinema. Dragging up the rear are such half-forgotten horror wannabes as Paula Dupree, the Captive Wild Woman, and Rondo Hatton's pitiable persona, the Creeper. And stuck squarely in the middle of the pack is that bandaged bastion of undying love, Kharis the Mummy.

With his lethargic gait and his absurdly relentless passion, Kharis is one of the least respected of all classic horror figures. Saddled with repetitive storylines and painfully modest budgets, the Kharis saga had the bad luck of emerging as part of Universal's fright factory assembly line of the 1940s. Yet despite its inherent dramatic limitations, this monster series was successful enough to generate a small but faithful following. Indeed, along with the studio's incessant tag team matches involving Frankenstein, Dracula and the Wolf Man, the Kharis series neatly epitomizes the cheap and cheesy fun of late period Universal horror. For those who grew up with Saturday monster matinees and late night Creature Feature telecasts, the sight of Kharis lumbering toward the reincarnation of his beloved can still conjure up a fond, nostalgic smile.



Kharis (Tom Tyler) was condemned to walk the Earth, guarding the tomb of Ananka and bringing death to those who would defile her burial place (Dick Foran), in *The Mummy's Hand*.

Universal's first foray into Egyptology, of course, was 1932's *The Mummy*. Featuring a wonderfully nuanced performance by Boris Karloff as the living dead Im-ho-tep (and his human incarnation, Ardath Bey), this classic horror yarn stands pyramids above the low-budget Kharis series. Film critics routinely praise the stylistic touches imparted by first-time director Karl Freund. But in spite of these critical plaudits, there remains a curious popular ambivalence toward *The Mummy*. With an emphasis on sustained but slow-paced atmosphere, this moody and lyrical golden age horror failed to match the impact of Universal's earlier ground-breaking horror shows. It is significant to note that, by the mid-1930s, Big U had produced well-made follow-ups to both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. Im-ho-tep, meanwhile, would never make a cinematic encore.

The characterization of the Mummy would lie dormant in its dusty sarcophagus until the horror genre de-

scended into programmer status a decade later. Under the guidance of a more profit-oriented management team, Universal studios championed a budget-conscious approach to film horror patterned after the standardized mysteries and Westerns that had become a staple of Hollywood filmmaking. Kharis, along with his fellow monster brethren, would soon find life in the routine mayhem of B-movie melodramatics. A quick look at the four films in this monster series reveals the weaknesses, as well as the attributes, of Universal's cookie cutter approach to cinema horror in the 1940s.

First off the assembly line was *The Mummy's Hand*. This 1940 release introduced the revised and resplendently hokey mythology that would become the cornerstone of Universal's second Mummy series. Three thousand years ago, Princess Ananka, daughter of the Egyptian pharaoh, died unexpectedly. Kharis, a royal prince, dared the wrath of the gods by stealing tana leaves, the

fluid of which could restore the princess to life. For his blasphemy, Kharis was condemned to walk the Earth as a living mummy, guarding the tomb of his beloved Ananka and bringing death to those who would defile her burial place. Aided and abetted by the High Priest of Karnak, this ancient Egyptian avenger is kept alive by regular doses of tana fluid, brewed during the cycle of the full moon. Add in one treasure-seeking expedition, a shapely and unsuspecting heroine, a cast of colorful supporting characters and quicker than

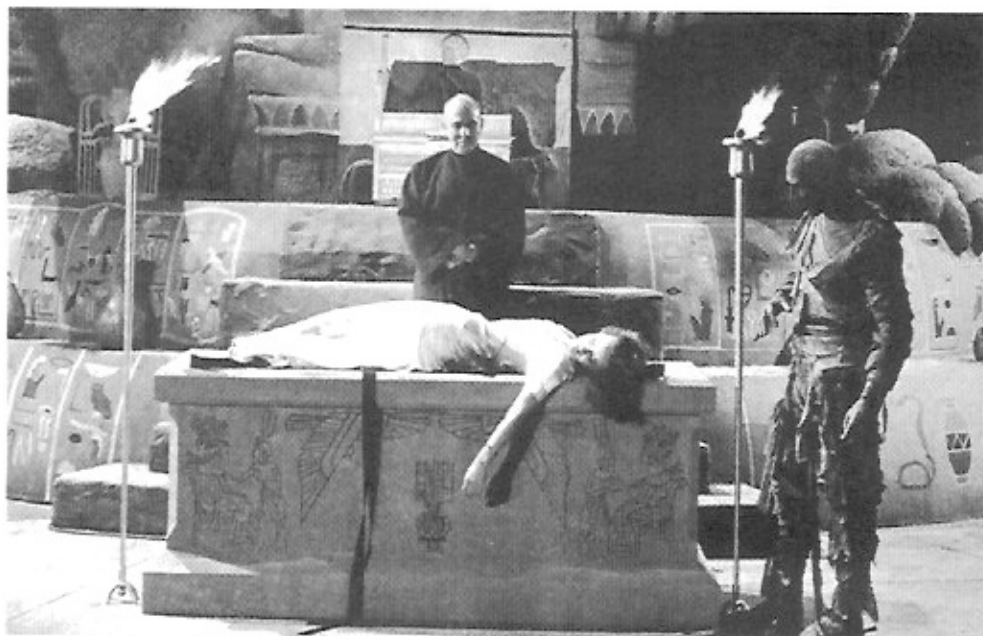
time is spent on the teaming and exploits of this quartet, a subplot which becomes a noticeable but not altogether unwelcome distraction from the limitations of this latest Mummy concept.

On the other side of the ledger, George Zucco is wonderfully despicable as Professor Andoheb, guardian of the Mummy and associate at the nearby Cairo Museum. And way down the list of players (billed eighth) is Western and serial star Tom Tyler in the title role of Kharis. Despite such ignominious billing, Tyler's lean and mean look

orbs and a steady but relentless pace, Tom Tyler's mummy takes on a ferocious appearance that future Mummy sequels would be sorely missing.

One notable cost-cutting trend in *The Mummy's Hand* is an explicit tendency to borrow from other, more lavishly budgeted films. In some ways, this is beneficial; the massive temple set (reused, according to Brunas, Brunas, and Weaver's *Universal Horrors*, from James Whale's *Green Hell*) becomes a marvelous focal point for the film's action scenes. Also effective is the Frank Skinner-composed/Hans Salter-arranged music score, lifted wholesale from *Son of Frankenstein*. On the downside, however, a montage of scenes lifted from the original *Mummy* creates a jarring stylistic contrast that the film never quite overcomes. Incorporated early in the plot, this sequence also implies a "let's get on with it" attitude that partly defeats the credibility it was intended to convey.

More damaging is the B-movie mentality that is written over every frame of film. Plot contrivances and improbabilities surface with irritating frequency, including a rock 'em, sock 'em barroom brawl. The



The massive temple set (reused from James Whale's *Green Hell*) becomes a marvelous focal point for the film's action scenes. Pictured are George Zucco, Peggy Moran, and Tom Tyler.

you can say "Amon Ra," Universal's newest monster series was off to an action-packed start.

A chief asset of *The Mummy's Hand* is its likable cast. Dick Foran's charming and effective portrayal of American archeologist Steven Banning is a pleasant change from the usual stiffness that Universal utilized in leading man roles. Accompanying him is Wallace Ford as Brooklyn-born sidekick Babe Jenson. Ford, whose wise-cracking cinematic shtick could quickly become tiresome, is largely kept in check by an eventful script and limited screen time. Rounding out the list of protagonists is sexy, wholesome Peggy Moran as love interest Marta Solvani and jolly Cecil Kellaway as her father. Considerable

made him an effective choice for the role of the 3,000-year-old killing machine. Tyler's secondary status, incidentally, is a telling indication of the lack of prestige that studio brass felt for their latest horror mascot.

Another attribute of the film is its impressive atmosphere. Veteran director Christy Cabanne successfully evoked the aura of moon-draped Egypt amidst the Universal backlot, despite the restrictive B-budget limitations. Especially effective are the scenes of the Mummy stalking and attacking his intended victims. A vignette in which Andoheb rejuvenates Kharis only to put a stranglehold on unsuspecting Dr. Petrie (Charles Trowbridge) is vintage Universal. With gaping, black-holed

banter between Foran and Ford takes on a jocular tone, peppered with topical references to Brooklyn and the Bronx. Such regional humor clearly establishes the film as a juvenile-oriented, non-prestige production. Curious also is a plot angle that is introduced but never properly resolved. Early in the film, Zucco is cautioned by priestly mentor Eduardo Ciannelli to refrain from giving Kharis more than nine tana leaves, lest he become an uncontrollable demon. Neither *The Mummy's Hand* nor any of its subsequent sequels would mention this intriguing idea again.

With a brisk pace and enjoyable characters, *The Mummy's Hand* easily outshines its programmer status. Along with *The Invisible Man Returns* and *Son*

of *Dracula*, the film is one of Universal's more enjoyable B-chillers of the decade. But the humble production values behind *Hand* would also be imposed upon the remaining films in the Kharis series, defining creative limitations that would be difficult to overcome.

Universal's wartime horror machine was at full production in 1942 when the next Kharis entry, *The Mummy's Tomb*, was produced. Utilizing all the cost-cutting tricks at its disposal, the studio was now stamping out its ready-made thrillers as efficiently as possible, often at the expense of the imaginative touches that had been its hallmark. Cinema horror was heading in a new direction and Universal, for better or worse, was leading the way.

Much of the premise of *The Mummy's Tomb* rehashes the storyline of its predecessor. Picking up the action after a lag of a few decades, Kharis is now guarded by priestly recruit Mehemet Bey (played by ultra-suave Turhan Bey). Onward to America the pair ferries to resume Kharis' mission of violent retribution against the Banning family. When Bey sets his sights on the film's lovely heroine, the climax of the movie becomes set in stone. In addition to its recycled plot elements, the film is hindered by the perfunctory directorial approach of Harold Young. When, for example, Kharis is dispatched on his nocturnal death walks, the opportunity to develop moody and memorable set pieces is thwarted by repetitive scenes and unimaginative camera angles. Moments like this exemplify the ho-hum approach that was beginning to define Universal's Mummy saga.

Even more than the prior film, *The Mummy's Tomb* utilizes an overly generous amount of recycled film footage. The movie's opening reel contains a nearly 10-minute montage recapping the plot of *The Mummy's Hand* to bring neophyte viewers up to date. Sharp-eyed observers will also recognize clips from *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* when the townsfolk go on their obligatory torch-wielding rampage at the film's finale. Universal was becoming adept at this sort of cinematic cost

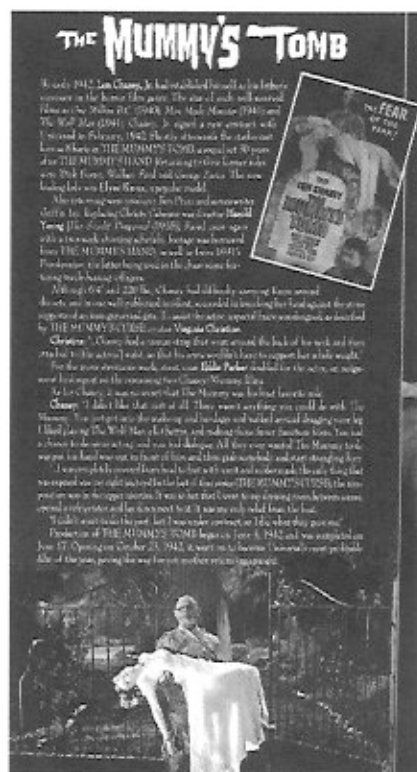


Courtesy Ronald V. Borst/Hollywood Movie Posters

efficiency measure; its Frankenstein series would soon begin a yearly ritual of grafting the fiery climax from *Ghost of Frankenstein* onto subsequent thrillers of rapidly diminishing quality. Like old friends, these sequences would find their way into the story no matter how improbable the logic might be to justify their inclusion.

Performances in the film range from adequate to nondescript. Lon Chaney, Jr. takes over the gauze and latex in this one and (unlike Tom Tyler)

gets top billing for the honor. Like his appearance in *Ghost of Frankenstein*, Chaney lumbers about with little emoting and even less energy. (In retrospect, Lon must take the rap for the popular image of Kharis as a comically slow, easily escapable monster menace.) Turhan Bey makes for a very uncharacteristic Universal bad guy; with his exotic good looks, he is less overtly villainous and more believably romantic than the average studio heavy. Dick Foran and Wallace Ford reprise their



Art for MCA/Universal's laser disc box set of the '40s Kharis Mummy series.

roles from the previous film in old age masquerade (briefly, it turns out, until Kharis tracks them down). Less enjoyable are the bland romantic escapades of hero John Hubbard and heroine Elyse Knox. Ms. Knox is unquestionably attractive and her 1940s sex appeal is sufficiently potent to justify Bey's hormonal overdrive. Hubbard, however, displays the Boy Scout blandness all too typical of the male leads in Universal's wartime horror shows.

The film's shift in locale adds little to the rapidly dissipating Mummy mystique. Set in the Bannings' New England hometown of Mapleton, the small town American setting actually detracts from the fragile atmosphere so essential to an effective grade-B horror film. Indeed, the results nearly prove comic; Kharis is unable to embark on his midnight prowls without disturbing dogs, livestock and sleepy senior citizens. One almost expects to hear garbage can lids come crashing down as our poor beleaguered mummy goes fumbling about his new and unfamiliar surroundings.

To be fair, *The Mummy's Tomb* has its share of modest attributes. The sight

of Kharis carting off Elyse Knox, her diaphanous nightgown billowing in the moonlight, is a beauty. The film's fiery climax at the Banning house is also nicely mounted. Such stylistic touches are few and far between, however. Universal was now aiming its fright fest at a less discriminating, middle-of-the-road audience. Any thrills left in this monster series would be more the result of sheer luck than strategic planning.

Next out of the studio's stamping plant was 1944's *The Mummy's Ghost*. Unwilling to tamper with a tried and true formula, Universal once recycled many of the same plot points from its prior Mummy potboilers. But with a new director at the helm, a slight twist to the reincarnation angle and a few stylistic surprises, the next Kharis excursion breathes enough life into the series to justify another trip to the land of pharaohs and tana leaves.

This time out, priestly recruit Yousef Bey (the ever charismatic John

Carradine) is dispatched to Mapleton to retrieve Kharis and the body of Princess Ananka. Unexpectedly, Ananka's soul is transformed into the body of local college student Amina Mansouri (Ramsay Ames), who succumbs to a somnambulistic trance whenever her 3,000-year-old lover boy is in the vicinity. The usual second-rate histrionics follow, with Bey falling victim to the temptation of Amina's pretty face. With the townsfolk once again at his heels, Kharis permanently thwarts his romantic rival and, in a surprisingly tragic turn, carries Amina's body with him into a bottomless quicksand pit.

In spite of its repetitive storyline, *The Mummy's Ghost* provides enough new thrills to make for entertaining viewing. Imaginative touches abound. The opening reel setup (which has become annoyingly predictable by now) is thankfully free from the familiar film clips that gave prior sequels a leftover look. Instead, the narrative segues from George Zucco's verbal recanting of the



The Mummy's Tomb's fiery climax at the Banning house is nicely mounted. Such stylistic touches are few and far between.

legend to college professor Frank Reicher's lecture of the same talk to an incredulous student audience. Effective also is the murder of a museum security guard who, moments before, was occupied with a "Lights Out"-style radio mystery.

Most welcome of all is the new reincarnation angle, with Amina doing the mystic swoon whenever faithful Kharis is on the prowl. In a truly weird touch, the afflicted young woman develops a prominent gray tuft (à la *Bride of Frankenstein*) that lengthens with each close encounter with her mummified lover. By film's finale, Amina's body takes on the appearance of a withered, ancient corpse. The transformation of Princess Ananka's soul into a youthful, living visage dovetails so smoothly into the Kharis saga that casual viewers might assume that this new story angle was there all along. Metaphysical reincarnation was, of course, a prominent theme in the original *Mummy*, but this idea had taken a backseat to physical action when Kharis took over for the now-forgotten Im-ho-tep. Credit for the reintroduction of this concept should go to scriptwriters Griffin Jay, Henry Sucher and Brenda Weisberg, who presumably felt that Universal's *Mummy* legend was in desperate need of fresh blood.

Typical of many B-films of this era, the performances in *The Mummy's Ghost* are a mixed bag. John Carradine, who was quickly becoming a mainstay in the world of Universal horror, is a standout. Utilizing the laser beam stare that would later serve him well as Count Dracula, Carradine is both menacing and virile in his portrayal of Yousef Bey. Lon Chaney, Jr.'s appearance as Kharis is an improvement over his work in *The Mummy's Tomb* largely due to the new shading of pathos that the script provides. Less impressive are the film's hero and heroine. As the doomed Amina, Ramsay Ames is attractive but gives a mopey, one-note performance, while Robert Lowery, as her college-aged boyfriend, is downright dislikable. Belligerent to everyone within earshot, Lowery easily ranks as the most unsympathetic protagonist in the Kharis series. (One wishes that our Egyptian monster



In many ways, *The Mummy's Ghost* is Universal's quintessential 1940s monster movie.

friend could triumph over such an unworthy adversary.) It is interesting to note that Chaney, with his "aw shucks" film persona, would have fared far better as the hero in these second-rate melodramas. Studio brass, however, was intent on exploiting the Chaney name for its marquee value, regardless of the true nature of his talent.

In many ways, *The Mummy's Ghost* is Universal's quintessential 1940s monster movie. All of the obligatory ingredients of 1940s horror are here—the episodic pace, the contrived but nonetheless effective shock formula, the rampaging yet legitimately sympathetic monster and the untrustworthy mortal crony, whose actions help speed the film to a final reel calamity. Recycling (in this case both forward and backward) is still very much in evidence; the museum-based attempt to resurrect Ananka's mummified shell echoes the Karloff/Freund original, while the film's quicksand finale presages the conclusion of *House of Frankenstein*. Thrills are aplenty,

with atmospheric murder scenes and enough action set pieces to hold the attention of a modern-day audience. In the capable hands of director Reginald LeBorg, the film overcomes its predictable, cliché-ridden script and becomes an unexpectedly entertaining model of filmmaking on the thrift.

The Mummy's Ghost was one of Universal's last reasonably effective horror shows. Kharis was by now saddled with the reputation of a methodical, mindless killing machine (much as the studio's *Frankenstein* Monster had become). Although the resurrection of Princess Ananka breathed new life into the series, it was clear that this venerable stock figure was now painted into an Egyptian alley with nowhere left to go.

The law of diminishing returns was clearly on display with the release of 1944's *The Mummy's Curse*. A quick look at the repetitive title alone suggests that creative apathy was the order of the day. From a technical point of view, the film is solid and accomplished, eas-



ily measuring up to Universal's usual standards of professionalism. But beyond the slick cinematic veneer, the approach used in the production of *The Mummy's Curse* is strictly by the numbers.

For the finale in the Kharis series, the locale shifts inexplicable to Louisiana Cajun country. The Mummy and his reincarnated love now turn up in a local swamp where government workers are draining the wetlands. New Arkam priest Ilzor Zandaab (Peter Coe) comes to America to return the ancient lovers to mother Egypt, but his plans are thwarted by the carnal urges of deceitful assistant Ragheb (Martin Kosleck). For his cinematic exit, Kharis

is buried beneath a crumbling temple wall while Ananka once again morphs into a petrified old hag. To perceptive movie fans, the moral of the story is clear—the gods of cinema do not look kindly upon eternal love.

In moments, *The Mummy's Curse* sparkles. The misty swampland, backlit in unearthly fashion, is one of the most arresting backdrops of the entire Mummy series. Cajun field hands sign themselves with a cross convincingly when Kharis' murderous exploits are discovered; one adds a memorable touch when he exclaims, "The devil's on the loose and he's dancing with the Mummy!" Best of all is the vignette in which Princess Ananka arises anew.

From her miry grave she awakens, writhing like a newborn and groping against the merciless midday sun. The impact of this sequence is marred only by its aftermath, wherein the youthful Ananka is found wandering about the swamp in all her coiffured, cosmetic glory.

But effective moments alone are not enough to save this film from the curse of mediocrity. Like its predecessors, the script of *The Mummy's Curse* rehashes familiar and predictable incidents, resulting in an inevitable sense of "been there, done that." The opening reel starts out on a disappointing note, incorporating (yet again!) the tried and true film clips that recap the Kharis/Ananka legend. High priest Zandaab once again explains the tana leaf ritual in excruciating detail, while Kharis continues to display the wanton homicidal tendencies that give undead Egyptian artifacts a bad name. The unimaginative circle becomes complete when the film's denouement falls back on the infatuation/betrayal motif that wore out its welcome three sequels ago. (Zandaab is ironically the only Arkam holy man to resist the temptations of the flesh and remain true to his sacred vows. His faithfulness, alas, does not go rewarded.) All in all, the Mummy saga has by now taken on the feel of a low-budget serial, complete with repetitive episodes and an easy-to-predict storyline.

One unexpected bonus is the unintentional comic sequences that enliven the film's running time. The sight of Kharis ambling after his Egyptian lover goddess only to see her chauffeured away in a speeding automobile is guaranteed to bring down the house. Priceless also are the remarks of Dr. Cooper (Holmes Herbert) when Ananka stumbles into his tent seeking shelter during one of Kharis' midnight romps. "I don't think anyone can help you in your present state of mind," the Doc quips in wonderfully condescending fashion. Perhaps the best laugh occurs during Kharis' initial dose of rejuvenating tana fluid. Instructed by Zandaab to seek his beloved and kill anyone in his way, Kharis does a dutiful about face and finds himself standing eyeball to

eyeball with a startled Ragheb. Moments like these make one wonder if Universal might have unconsciously anticipated the lampooning their classics would soon receive at the hands of Abbott and Costello.

As with Universal's other monster bashes, the cast of *The Mummy's Curse* is competent, though undistinguished. Chaney, approaching the end of his stint as Universal's all-around monster man, goes through the motions once again with no lasting impact. (The following decade, the struggling actor would find his true niche as a crusty character performer in Westerns, a role for which he was well suited.) Peter Coe is the least colorful of all Kharis' keepers, although Martin Kosleck atones nicely as the deceitful Ragheb. Rounding out the principals are Dennis Moore as the too-sensible hero, Kay Harding as the fresh-as-a-daisy heroine and lovely Virginia Christine as Princess Ananka. Christine, whose raven tresses and fetching smile recall a youthful Bettie Page, deserves extra points for her bravo enactment of Ananka's swampy rebirth. What a trouper!

Director Leslie Goodwins infuses a modicum of style into *The Mummy's Curse*. But the end of the road was near. Universal was by now milking the last drop of blood from all of its dying horror franchise. Kharis, a cinematic bastard child if there ever was one, felt the brunt of the budgetary ax more than most. The fact that this modest film series contains any entertainment value at all is a tribute to the collective talents of those who helped transcend the limits of budget and imagination imposed by the front office.

In retrospect, who deserves the "credit" for the Kharis series? Screen-

writer Griffin Jay toiled on the first three films and was responsible for the original story scenario; his overactive imagination helped reshape the original Im-

atmospheric screen terror was kept alive via producer Val Lewton's successful B-movie chillers for RKO, which in turn spawned such respectable genre ef-

forts as Paramount's *The Uninvited* and MGM's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Universal, meanwhile, was helping to pave the road toward crass, low-budget horror with its cheapjack series of monster programmers, of which the Kharis series is a painfully obvious example. The dichotomy introduced by these competing approaches remains with us today. Critics may sneer and purists may scoff, but the schlocky, dumbed down approach to screen shockers remains as much a part of the genre's history as the mood-inspired look of German Expressionism or the overt theatrical style of James Whale.

Upon this somewhat rickety pedestal stands Kharis' dubious claim to cinematic immortality. In a perfect world,

it might have been much different. When one reviews the ingredients of the 1940s Mummy saga, with its exotic locales, its haunting and poetic heart play, and its tragic intrusion of fate, it is easy to imagine a potentially memorable excursion into the realm of cinema fantasy. But it was not to be. Like the unforgiving gods of centuries ago, Universal's decision makers banished our ancient friend to the purgatory of B-movies. It is here that Kharis walks eternal, remembered and appreciated only by those whose love of the fantastic remains unencumbered by the fiscal realities of the Hollywood studio system.

Poor Kharis. He deserved a far better fate.



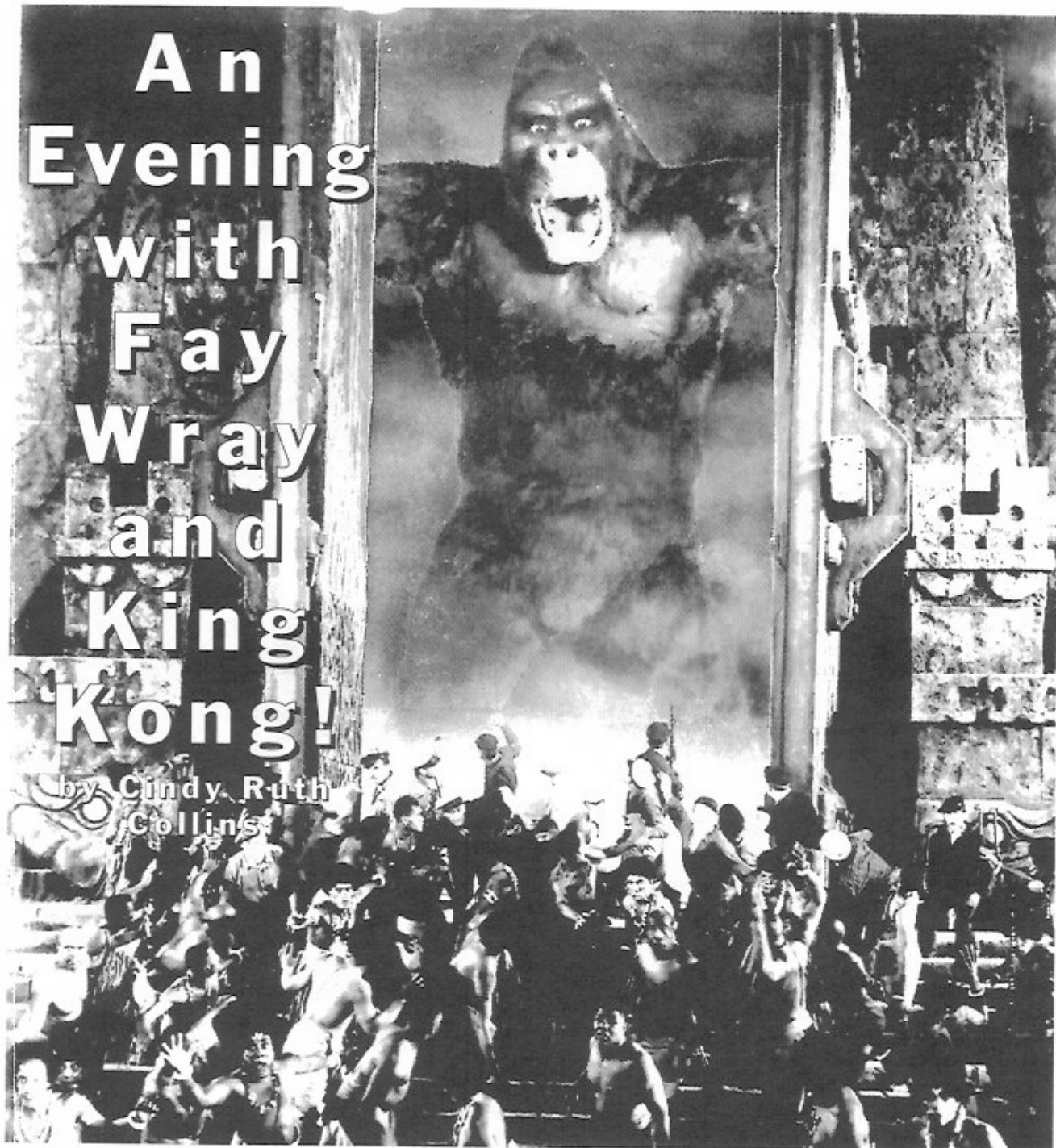
Director Leslie Goodwins infuses a modicum of style into *The Mummy's Curse*.

ho-tep mythos into a more cost-effective, action-based milieu. Acting in production capacity for the quartet of films was Ben Pivar, whom director Reginald LeBorg described as the stereotypically unimaginative studio executive (thanks again, Brunas, Brunas, and Weaver). His influence undoubtedly kept the series to the level of sophistication that was appropriate for an average 10-year-old. On the positive side, recognition should go to Universal's coterie of behind-the-scenes technicians (including makeup wizard Jack Pierce and musical director Hans Salter) who were routinely called upon to bring the impossible to life before our very eyes. Time and time again, they delivered.

The horror film faced a significant crossroads in the 1940s. High brow,

An Evening with Fay Wray and King Kong!

by Cindy Ruth Collins



Not until about 10 years after its release did Fay Wray realize that King Kong would be immortal. She was pushing a baby carriage down L.A.'s Olympic Boulevard when a young man walking toward her suddenly dropped his jaw and exclaimed, "You were in King Kong!"

Some 65 years after its first run, Kong still holds that sort of power over its audience. On April 29, 1998, a capacity crowd filled the Smithsonian's

Baird Auditorium to help Fay Wray watch a restored print of King Kong. Many grown-ups brought their kids, and NPR's Murray Horowitz (who conducted a post-screening Q & A with Miss Wray) mentioned that his son thought that of all the cool things he'd ever gotten to do, this was definitely the coolest.

The audience seemed to agree. Miss Wray was greeted with standing ovations at every turn. Even her credit

and her first on-screen appearance drew applause. And as for the film itself, well, there are very few genre experiences more rewarding than watching Kong as it was meant to be seen—bigger than life.

As the Q & A later revealed, Miss Wray feels the film's power lies in its ability to draw us in and make us believe the unbelievable action taking place on screen. For her, the film is no metaphor for the Depression (or any of



Bruce Cabot, Fay Wray, and Robert Armstrong in *King Kong*.

the other "messages" critics have wrangled out of it over the years), but is simply a film about a giant ape, which achieves believability because the actors believed in it. In fact, even Miss Wray herself gets drawn in on those rare occasions when she gets to see the movie.

Curiously, this actress who gained screen immortality for a role involving lots of lung power initially opposed the introduction of sound into movies. She believed, as many did, that the silent cinema had already achieved a sort of perfection and that the new technology would force the industry to start all over again. She later reevaluated, deciding that nothing was lost with sound, that it was just a new element to add to the pictures. But she still didn't like her "tinny" voice in the early talkies.

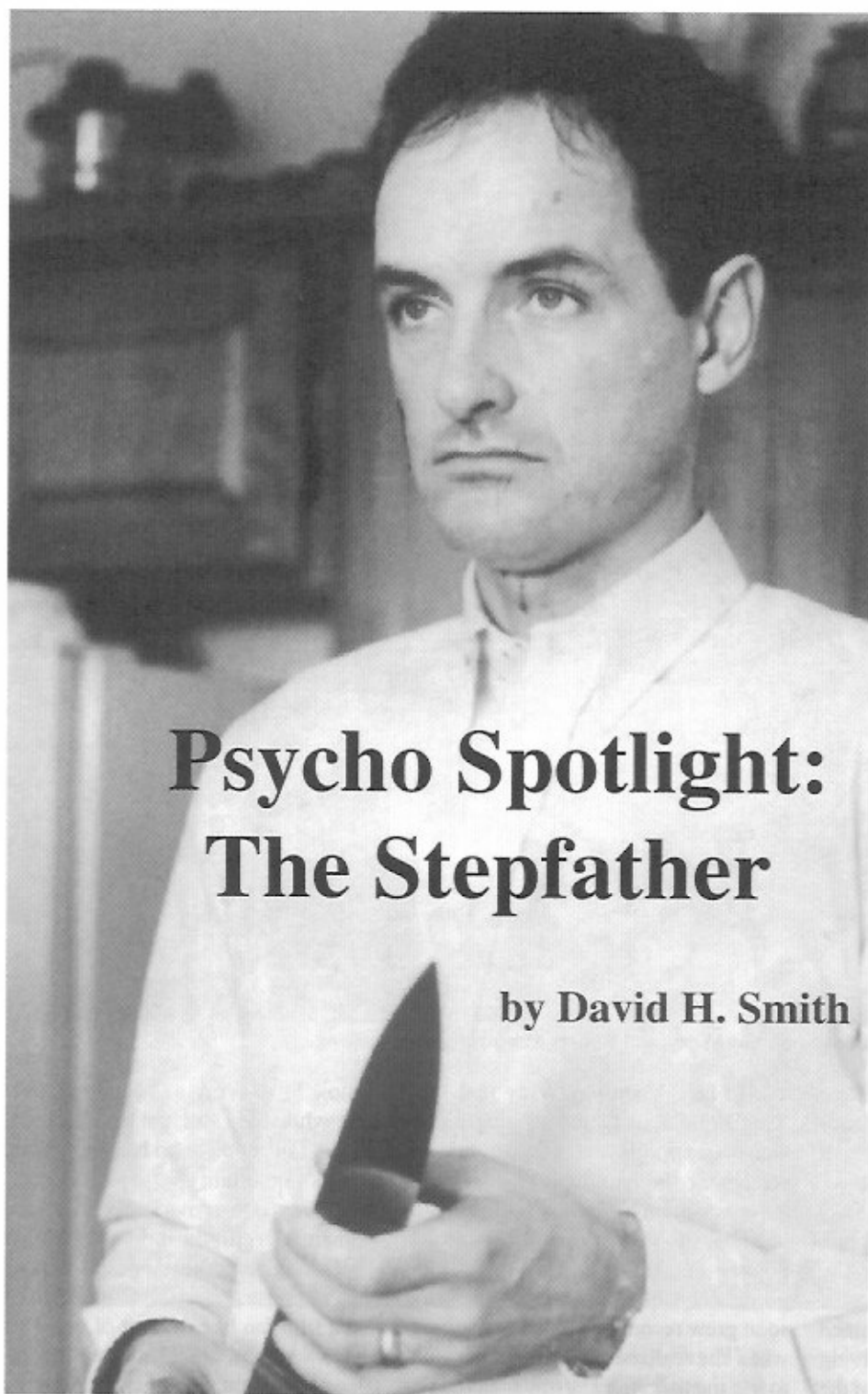
In fact, when Fay Wray first saw *King Kong* at its Grauman's premiere, she was appalled at the amount of screaming she had done in the film... but was still impressed by the ape's big muscles (it's nice to know, Horowitz pointed out, that Kong's love did not go entirely unrequited!). Miss Wray soon grew reconciled to her screaming when she realized that it helped bring to life the tiny Ann Darrow mannequin squirming in Kong's hand.

Of particular interest to genre fans is that production on *King Kong* took so long that Fay Wray appeared in not one but three additional horror films while Kong was in the works: *The Most Dangerous Game*, plus *Dr. X*, and *Mystery of the Wax Museum*. Hollywood rumors suggested that Kong would be "interesting," and the studios wanted to

exploit Miss Wray as heavily as possible while they still had the chance.

For an actress who has recognized Kong's immortality for over 50 years, Fay Wray is a remarkably balanced woman. Declining the "screen goddess" status that others would impose on her, she prefers to think of herself as just a film fan like the rest of us. This very sweet and "real" woman has retained her charm, intelligence and sense of humor over the years. And when Fay Wray blows kisses at the audience, you just know that it's out of appreciation, not part of some show for "the little people" out there.

Readers, if any celebrities are appearing in your area, *Midnight Marquee* wants to know. We would like to feature more of these "you are there" reports.



Psycho Spotlight: The Stepfather

by David H. Smith

I've always been fascinated by obsession. There is some clarity, however unreasonable, about knowing what it is you want and wanting it to the exclusion of everything else. It simplifies things. I never wanted to be obsessed, merely to observe the compulsion in others.

To my mind, the most watchable film example of obsession comes in actor Terry O'Quinn's chilling portrayal of *The Stepfather* (1987). Lost in the decade's shuffle of interchangeable slasher sequels and cut-rate variations of tried and true horror themes, the movie was sadly neglected in its day;

although it spawned two inevitable sequels itself, *The Stepfather* was and is one of the true originals of the eighties.

From its matter-of-fact beginning with the title character showering off the blood of his butchered family and grooming himself to assume a new identity, Terry O'Quinn's performance is riveting. He is a meek-looking maniac who marries widows with children—and then murders them when they fail to meet up to his expectations of perfection.

Even with the aftermath of his carnage shown, O'Quinn comes across as so benignly likable we want to cheer him on, hoping that he somehow will be able to fulfill his patriarchal ambition. Unlike the goalie-masked Mongoloid idiots and fire-scarred incubi of the era, we are not so much anxious for the wisecracks to fly, knives to slash and the blood to flow (perhaps with a fleeting glimpse of a bared female breast or buttock) as we are to see what drives this character to homicidal rage.

What the family at the beginning of the film has done to incur his wrath is never revealed, but we are engrossed (rather than grossed-out) when his story resumes a year later with a new wife, stepchild and suburban idyll. The natural state of humanity, psychology pioneer Sigmund Freud said, is to be neurotic; being out of sync with one's surroundings is quite normal. But here the psychopath is quite perfectly attuned to his environs. A successful real estate agent (how his

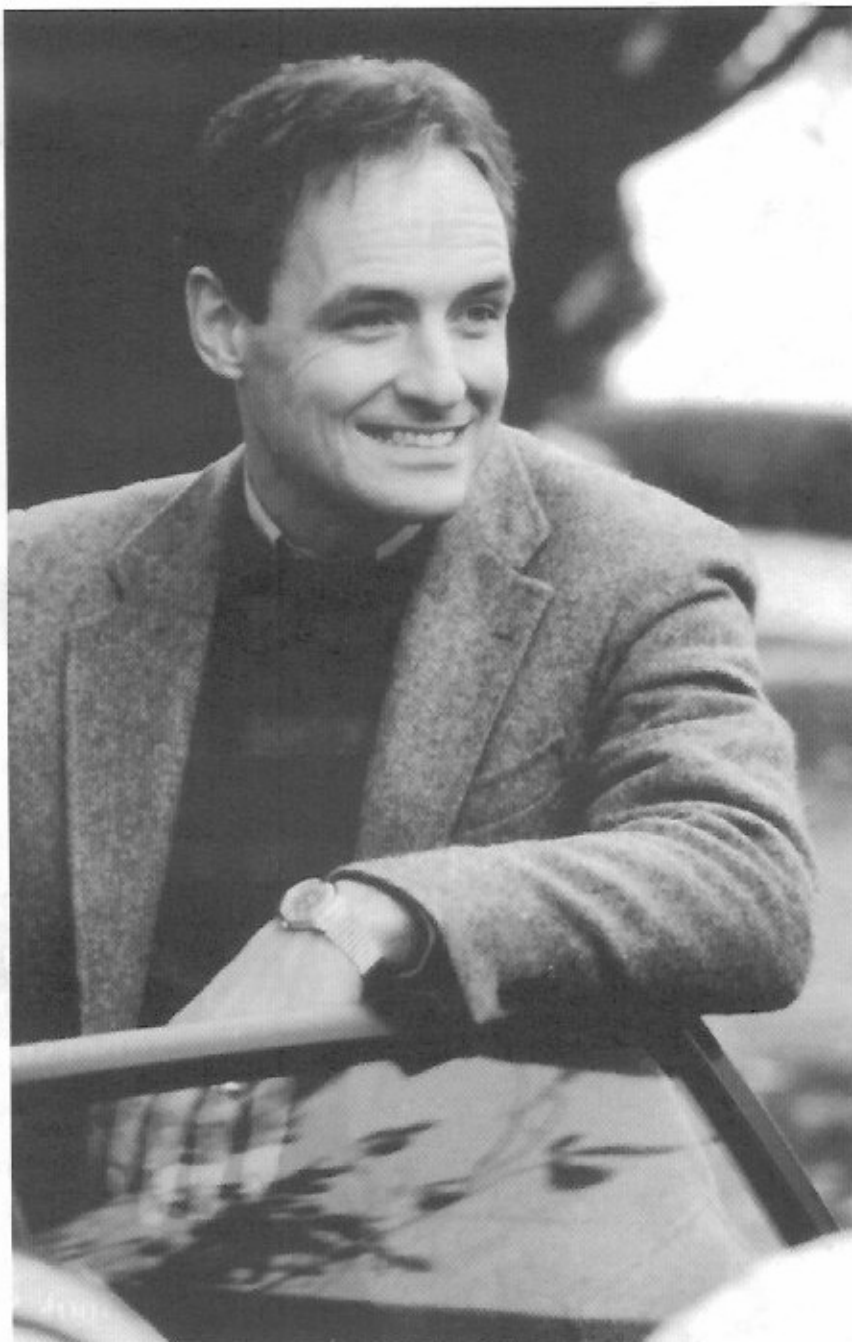
manufactured identity earned a state license is never explained), his home life is marred only by his new daughter (Jill Schoelen)'s behavior problems at school and her spurning of his sincere overtures of paternal love. In spite of his best efforts (surprising her with a new puppy, having her school expulsion

overturned, etc.) to win her over, she remains cold to him, suspicious her mother's smiling new husband is not what he appears to be. Already we see the threads of his new life starting to unravel.

Even with the unconditional love of his new wife (Shelley Hack) and the friendship of his clients and neighbors, this one glitch in his new life gnaws at him. While he hints at a strict upbringing himself, we never learn the details of what has driven him to this devotion to and obsession for the picture-perfect nuclear family. We only know he will not settle for less, and he will certainly brook no interference with his efforts to attain it. When his daughter's therapist (Charles Lanyer) tries to trip him up, we see the layers of the stepfather's sanity peel away in a bloody rage. There is no point in continuing the charade. This new family has failed him as well; they must die; he must move on.

With dark humor (courtesy of screenwriter Donald E. Westlake) and firm direction (the underrated Joseph Ruben), *The Stepfather* builds to a shattering climax. The stepfather begins to fashion a new professional and personal life for himself in a nearby town, but his deception comes prematurely undone in a sudden, terrifying moment of identity crisis with his wife. An erstwhile brother-in-law (Stephen Shellen) has hunted him down, but his obsession (for revenge) is nothing compared to his quarry's (for normalcy). The mother and daughter are left unprepared and defenseless. Through it all, Patrick (Yes, *The Moody Blues*) Moraz's haunting music is a perfect fit.

It's a shame *The Stepfather* was lost in the bustle of horror films of the time. Shelley Hack proves her acting ability far exceeded the limitations of her *Charlie's Angels* debut, and onetime "scream queen" Jill Schoelen literally embodies teenage angst (though the utterly gratuitous shower scene borders on *Lolita*-like voyeurism). But it is Terry O'Quinn, only receiving his due lately as a co-star of TV's *Millennium*, who carries the film with every fascinating nuance. Perhaps not graced with the "presence" of other leading men, we



Terry O'Quinn carries the film with every fascinating nuance.

are nevertheless drawn to O'Quinn's every action and reaction, listening and looking for subtle changes that mark his transition from calm to rage. Even when he remains subdued, he does it with thrilling understatement.

Thomas Hines wrote in *Worth* magazine that we are embedded in consumer trance that we "make no distinction between packages and their contents." I would add that, for many, this inability to discriminate between pack-

age and contents extends far beyond the supermarket to the local cineplex and video store. *The Stepfather*, unlike its brethren on the next marquee or on the shelf below, is a film that is a brooding, suspenseful, even realistic portrait of a psychopath on the road to breakdown.

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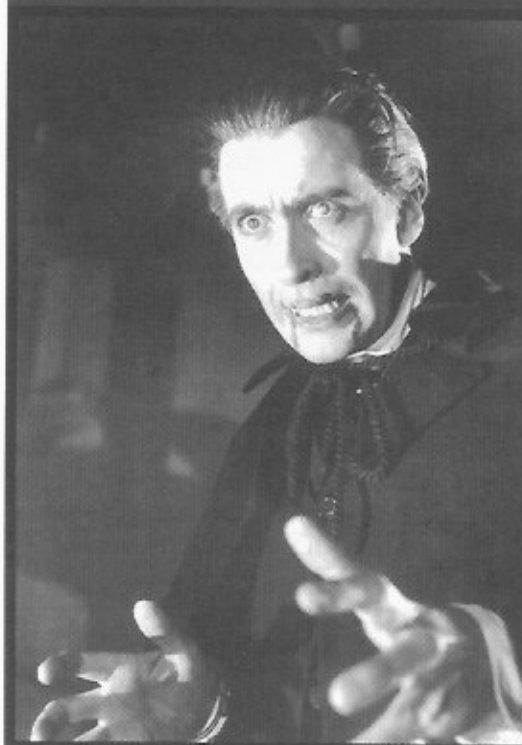
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MOVIE REVIEWS

By Gary J. Svehla

RATINGS: 4 stars (excellent); 3 stars (good); 2 stars (fair); 1 star (poor)

EVENT HORIZON: 2.5

Like most classic movies, *Alien* and *Aliens* spawned more bad movies than good ones; but the poorly received *Event Horizon* of last season had many good points going for it, and it was unjustly maligned by most critics (in fact encouraging me to forgo seeing the movie theatrically).

First of all, screenwriter Philip Eisner created a marvelous premise of a plot; the only problem, he never knew how to develop it beyond the premise stage. Without doubt, this film belongs to director Paul Anderson (of *Mortal Kombat* fame) and cinematographer Adrian Biddle, for the visual look of the film (kudos also to Production Designer Joseph Bennett and Art Director Malcolm Middleton) with its kinetic energy and editing creates the perfect scare-fest in outer space.

First of all, the idea of a haunted house in outer space, *without* monstrous aliens, is refreshing. More refreshing is the Freudian concept that the space craft is a living organism which utilizes a defense mechanism of pitting the invading space voyagers against their worst, hidden psychological fears (an idea borrowed from the schlocky *Journey to the 7th Planet*), which has never been better adapted to the big screen. Its imagery reminded me more of Kubrick's *The Shining* than of *Alien*, with gushing blood enveloping the spacecraft and seductive, sexual female predators approaching only to reveal

themselves to be disfigured at the final, crucial moment. Here the music by Michael Kamen melds wonderfully with the tightly edited images concocted by director Anderson to create the first truly supernatural haunted house in outer space: visions of Sam Neill being terrified by the fleeting images of his wife who actually climbs into the tub and slits her wrists; images of Kathleen Quinlan searching in vain for her little girl; and illusions of a charcoaled human constantly on fire confronting Laurence Fishburne who left him to burn alive in a terrifying rescue operation; for me, *Event Horizon* contained the most goosebumps of any horror movie in the last several years.

The major gyroscopic set piece of the picture, the black hole-creating-core at the heart of the space vessel, truly mesmerizes with its spinning gears within gears circling on revolving spheres that self-activates itself beaming one poor soul into a dimension of "pure chaos." Once the unfortunate Jack Noteworthy returns, he is plagued by the black void which he both saw and which is now inside him, a void causing him to attempt self destruction by thrusting himself into the vastness of space, in perhaps the movie's most gripping sequence. Noseworthy changes his mind at the last moment, the veins in his arms already beginning to bulge outward. Fishburne attempts a rescue from outer space where he catches the imploding engineer, whose eyes are popping and blood is gushing from his mouth, and literally forces him back into the space craft, the young man screaming in mortal pain all the way.

Original in concept and execution, this sequence truly delivers the goods.

At this point the film could almost be a haunting arthouse piece which opted for deep psychological terrors concerning individuals finding the courage to face their worst fears in life (albeit in a bloodbath too rich for most arthouse circles), but as has been the failing of many supernatural haunted house/ghost thrillers of the past, the movie is compromised when its screenplay attempts to explain *why*. Sometimes the cinematic vision and psychological insight are enough to carry a movie, but no, *Event Horizon* has its creator Sam Neill suggest that the ship, using its black hole/curved space mumbo-jumbo, jumped to another dimension, Hell, and that both crews (its original one which is seen briefly cannibalizing each other on the visual ship's log) are doomed to suffer the consequences of opening such a portal. Soon Neill is transformed at first into an eyeless victim then a Cenobite-appearing human ambassador to Hell (becoming the monster that this film fought so hard to avoid and which is not needed nor appreciated) becoming *Hellraiser in Outer Space* (which is exactly what *Hellraiser IV* became) complete with imagery of humans hanging by hooks from ceilings and victims being subjected to torture and excruciating pain. Of course, this all leads to a climax with the *Event Horizon* being detonated with explosives in a race against time as a few survivors manage to escape in a rescue pod. Of course, when the crew is rescued months later, Joely Richardson has the final fright of having one of her



Meg Ryan portrays a surgeon in *City of Angels*, a movie whose depiction of angels is quite intriguing even if the plot falls apart in the final third.

kindly rescuers momentarily transform into one of the Hell Spawns as she shivers and shakes as the rescuers attempt to calm her down. *Carrie in Outer Space*, oh my God!

Event Horizon is two-thirds a wonderful, terrifying roller coaster ride to the end of the universe—and back. Its crafty cast of trained veterans (Laurence Fishburne, Sam Neill, Kathleen Quinlan) together with interesting newcomers (Joely Richardson, Jack Noteworthy, Richard T. Jones) create an outer space crew to care about. The psychologically induced fright and almost surreal imagery is simply mind-numbing. But in the film's final half hour, with its visit to Hell and back scenario, and its introduction of the by-the-book Sam Neill monster, the movie loses most of its momentum and, before our eyes, melts down into warmed-over mush. For once too much plot destroyed the haunting mysticism and mood. But for what it attempted to do, my hat's off to *Event Horizon*, a most interesting failure.

CITY OF ANGELS: 2.0

Screenwriters Dana Stevens and Jenny Wingfield used Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* as their inspiration for this loose, Americanized remake. Director Brad Silberling (who helmed the frothy yet energetic *Casper*) has transcended the ghost genre and is now tackling the subject of angels.

While the casting of Meg Ryan as a heart surgeon (a little hard to believe) and the always interesting Nicolas Cage as Seth (the Angel) is interesting, the visual look of the movie more closely resembles *The Hunger* or *The Lost Boys*, for these angels do not sprout wings or even radiate halos or bright light. No, these angels wear long, dark coats and seem about as happy as mourners at a funeral. When they ominously gather together at the library (as messengers of the dead and guidance counselors to air traffic controllers, nervous holdup victims, etc.), they more closely resemble a cult of vampires than benevolent angels. Even when they gather on the seashore at sunrise to listen for the angelic music, they seem more possessed than possessing. A strange lot these angels are.

The movie's beginning sequences, involving the death of a cute little girl, with Nicolas Cage's stark presence in the OR, create a genuinely creepy mood. The angel and the now dearly departed child stand quietly by observing as the team of doctors try in vain to resuscitate her, her spirit having already left the body as the mother cries in grief over her child. The final shot shows the little girl, hand in hand with Cage, quickly walking down the hospital corridor "going home," the duo invisible to any living human.

Cage's obsession and attraction to the female doctor, Meg Ryan, becomes

even creepier as he stands sometimes only inches from her as she performs her job, Cage pressing his hand on one side of a glass wall against hers on the other side. He sometimes sits in the hall or hovers over her, simply watching and listening, a thoughtful expression in his eyes.

Dennis Franz, as Nathaniel Messinger, an over-bloated hedonist who sneaks pints of Ben and Jerry's ice-cream into his hospital room the night before open heart surgery, surprises Cage when he sees him, a shock made clear when Franz announces he used to also be an angel but that he "has fallen" by his choice of freewill and is no longer angelic but human, proud of his family, the wife and kids. And in his subtle manner encourages Cage to make the decision of whether to remain an angel or take the plunge and become mortal.

In a sadly faltering plot (the final 15 minutes are almost embarrassing), after Cage becomes human and wins the heart of Ryan, and when the already too-long movie doesn't end there, the viewer knows that the story must be moving toward a new dramatic climax, and of course that means someone has to die. Predictably, Ryan goes biking along the roads near her getaway cabin up in the woods, coasting along the roadside with her eyes closed (the viewer knows at this point the end is near) when a giant 18-wheeler carrying sawed lumber is nearing the intersection. Bam, in a flash, it's done. Cage hears commotion and rushes to the accident scene, the truck driver having gone for help, leaving the slightly bloodied Ryan all curled up neatly in the middle of the road. In a typical Hollywood-style death from the 1930s-'40s, Ryan perks up when Cage arrives, babbles forth romantic gibberish for two minutes, and then quietly, painlessly dies, at first apologizing for "screwing up." After the funeral, Cage sputters forth drivel about it being better to have known her for even one moment than existing in eternity without having known her, and then he bites into a pear.

The unsatisfying, needlessly depressing finale seems pat and from another era, but the film's depiction of dour angels is curiously affecting, and

Nicolas Cage's performance is off kilter enough to work.

GODZILLA: 3.0

It's been quite some time since Hollywood has attempted an outright monster-on-the-loose romp, and Roland Emmerich's remake of the Japanese franchise *Godzilla* is more hit than miss, a stunning tribute to the 1950s and its classic monsters-attack epics: *Them, It Came From Beneath the Sea* (a snippet of this Ray Harryhausen classic is viewed on television during the movie), *The Giant Behemoth*, *The Giant Scorpion* and *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*.

While *Godzilla*'s artistic execution follows directly on the heels of the recent *Jurassic Park* (whose CGI animation it most resembles, especially with the youngsters hatching from their eggs and chasing humans down twisting, dark corridors) and *Alien/Aliens* (with its cavern of baby monster eggs which hatch in Madison Square Garden), its over-the-top homage to the 1950s and its popcorn mentality literally blows the roof right off the theater. *Godzilla* becomes fun in a way that Emmerich's former blockbuster *Independence Day* (too top-heavy with soap opera plotting with too few sequences of special effects) failed to deliver.

Basically, *Godzilla* revisits the meticulous formula that made the giant monsters movies of the 1950s so exhilarating and fun, then multiplies the quotient by about a million percent. First, we have the moody, ominous first appearance of the beast as it attacks unsuspecting barges and ships at sea. The audience is treated to the effects of the destruction and the poor victims' reactions, with hardly a glimpse of the monster (to evoke mood which it so wonderfully does). The second stage is to show the monster attacking the big city, but, the monster is not fully seen or is viewed in quick glimpses to increase suspense and anticipation. Fortunately, Emmerich's sea attacks are pulse-pounding and carefully edited (interestingly enough, the first victims are Japanese), one survivor, as recorded on videotape, mumbles the name "Gojira," the Japanese name for Godzilla (which was



Critical backlash to *Godzilla* has been harsh: Some say the film contains little plot, the special effects are not good enough, the giant lizard does not look anything like *Godzilla*! However, the movie delivers a solid roller coaster ride.

changed by American studios to make the monster sound more marketable and Americanized). During the first urban attacks, the monster is only viewed from the top of the torso down, so we are curious how the new American Godzilla looks compared to the original icon. Third, the symphonic, rousing musical score echoes the rhythm of destruction caused by the prehistoric terror. And David Stone's score, relatively free of modern rock/rap/pop music until the end credits, truly complements the action seen on screen. Fourth, historical or common place set-pieces, places heavy in the American consciousness, are either destroyed or become nesting places for the fiends. By now, the monster is seen in all its glory (reflecting the glory of the special effects team). Thus, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Chrysler Building and Madison Square Garden figure heavily in the plot of the new movie. And fifth, the leading characters become stereotypes that arouse the viewer's feelings of sympathy and compassion for the "humans vs. monsters" conflict. We have the cute rekindled couple, played by Matthew Broderick and Maria Pitillo. We have the devil-may-care friend, photographer Hank Azaria. And finally we have the mysterious foreigner who may be hero or villain, Jean Reno. These characters involve our emotions quickly and painlessly and we rapidly care that they sur-

vive. While the movie's action sequences are wild and wonderful, the action never becomes too breakneck that we forget plot, characters and mood. The basic, uncomplicated plot—just as simplistic as the 1950s monster invasion epics—does not get in the way of a good roller coaster ride!

And so what if the new Americanized *Godzilla* looks nothing like the *Godzilla* of Toho fame—'zilla '98 is a fantastic and fitting tribute to the dinosaur movies of old (and it even develops the principal theme of nuclear responsibility). If he were named any other generic name, the producers would have never acquired the \$120 million budget with which to work. And this monster is way cool! Get over it!!! Still one of the best lines occurs when the lame on-air broadcaster first calls the monster "Godzilla" after incorrectly hearing the name Gojira—Maria Pitillo ranting to herself, "It's Gojira..."

Godzilla is epic in the way monster movies haven't been since *Aliens*, and while *Godzilla* is generally nostalgic, fluffy fun, its visual look is panoramic and always interesting (the CGI effects still lack a naturalness found in the best of stop motion animation, but the technique's artistry is advancing slowly forward), its pacing is outstanding with just about the right blending of action, humor and suspense, while

the film's visual and musical rhythms juxtapose magnificently to create the cinematic adrenaline rush required.

Godzilla may well be the popcorn epic of the decade, for me surpassing *Jurassic Park* and others of that ilk. *Godzilla* proves that monster movies in the nineties can be derivative and cutting edge, all at the same time. Simply stated, *Godzilla* is one hell of a ride.

THE TRUMAN SHOW: 3.5

The problem with "thesis" movies is that most of them are so thought-pro-

voking and intellectual that their emotional component comes up either estranged or nonexistent. Fortunately for all, Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* is both intellectually mesmerizing and emotionally involving as well, featuring some truly grand performances, an intelligent and well-developed plot and enough directorial style to hammer home the originality of the entire project (something very rare for any movie made in the 1990s). Yes, it reminds one of the British TV series *The Prisoner*, but it goes far beyond presenting such

a superficial facade that is never explained.

The film's premise: Imagine, if you were born a ward of a corporation, and your every waking moment were recorded on video and broadcast 24 hours per day, for 30 years and counting, all across the worldwide airwaves. And suppose this "documentary" became the hottest show on television! The island community in which you live, Seahaven, is part of the world's largest movie set, all the people (including your parents, best friends, bosses, neighbors) actors and every event that occurs in your life orchestrated with one intention: Maintain viewers and get new people to watch. And suppose you, Truman Burbank, the star of this media-created universe, know *nothing* of your controlled existence!

Lou Reed once recorded an album, one of his worse come to think of it, called *Growing Up in Public*, and this is exactly what Jim Carrey's character is required to do. But media stars and celebrities are aware they are living in a goldfish bowl, but *not* Truman Burbank. And Jim Carrey furthers the contention that comic actors, when given a meaty, serious role, generally can do wonders with the material (think of Charlie Chaplin, Mickey Rooney, Ed Wynn, Robin Williams), and Jim Carrey demonstrates that quiet intensity can be as kind to him as broad comedy and a rubber-morphing face. Carrey, still comical in the lower-case sense, pulls off his coming to realize that his life is all a conspiracy, glimmer by glimmer, quite effectively, and as his universe comes crashing down (whether it be in the sequence where his actor/father drowns, discovering the *real people* beyond the elevator doors, coming to find that the cars and people in Seahaven follow a continuing "loop" of activity, escaping at sea during the climax), he evokes his sense of betrayal, confusion and fear magnificently. In other words, Jim Carrey, in such an artificial setting, emerges as a real human being, and he makes the audience care what is happening to him.

His supporting cast, mostly unknowns, do a superb job of maintaining the ensemble spirit to keep him so



subtly in line. Wife Meryl (Laura Linney) is annoyingly plastic, but to Carrey who only knows shallowness, she seems caring and sincere. Her best sequence arrives when Truman begins to catch on and she breaks down crying, stating her professionalism will not allow her to carry on in the role. Best friend Marlon (Noah Emmerich) tries to calm down the increasingly perceptive Truman by telling him, if everyone is part of this conspiracy, that I'm also part (as if to say, would you accuse me of being a Pod Person, me, your best friend—but that is exactly what his "script" requires him to do, manipulative Truman into believing that everything is exactly as it seems, and that Truman is being needlessly paranoid). And the Creator, Christof (Ed Harris, in an outstanding supporting characterization that generally plays him against type), the man who is described by the media as relishing his privacy, thrusts his "ward" into the public world of television, claiming that we, the media, can protect him from the evils of the outside world. However, at the movie's end, Christof almost manages to drown Truman who is trying to escape this shell game in a stormswept sailboat.

Peter Weir, who is most known for his eccentric quasi-art house movies *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*, as well as his more mainstream successes such as *Gallipoli* and *Dead Poets Society*, is here at the top of his form. But Peter Weir was a marvelous choice to helm this production, a visionary and eccentric director who can make the abstract linear and easy to follow. The wondrously perfect Seahaven houses, shops and streets (think Tim Burton or John Waters)—with the clever idea of having a klieg light drop mysteriously from the sky into the perfect, undisturbed community—perfectly captures the idea of David Lynch's theme that the underbelly of an ideal setting is never as perfect as it appears. The fascinating images of Christof and the directors working from a set high above the city disguised as the full moon in the sky is breathtaking, as is the edge of the studio set that Truman rams with his sailboat, when deciding whether to bail out by running

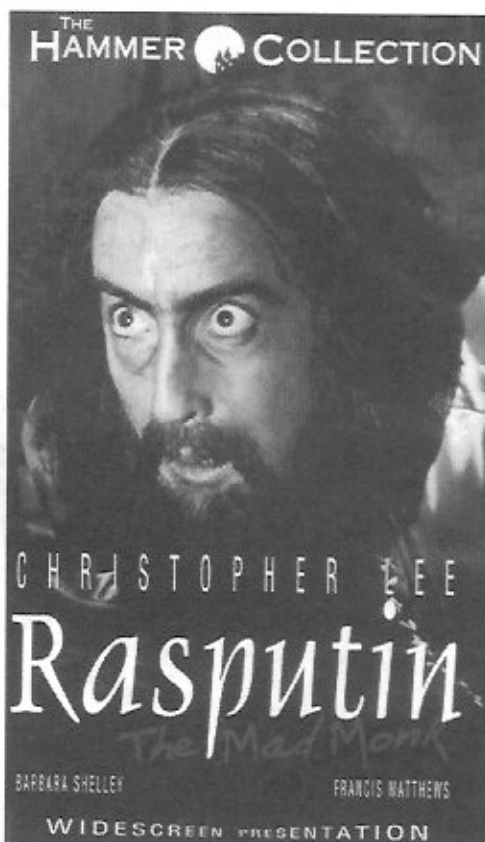
through the so-labeled "Exit" door.

And finally the thesis of the movie: Would a person be better off living in a controlled environment such as Seahaven, carefully protected by overseers who watch your every move, or would daring the unknown, being a free agent in a perilous, uncontrollable world be best? To be quite honest, personal freedoms have their limitations, and the artificiality of living in a scripted life is perhaps not any more phony than friends and relatives who, in the real world, sometimes act just as self-servingly and two-faced. By movie's end the entire television audience is shouting and waving their arms for Truman to escape, when, as soon as he makes his exit, the same people matter-of-factly inquire where's the *TV Guide*, what else is on, driving home the point of shallow commitment to a life that simply is not ours (case in point: MTV's *The Real World*).

In a decade of sequels and remakes and cookie-cutter vacuums, it is refreshing to see such a thoughtful and mesmerizing mainstream vehicle speak so eloquently of our age. In a beautiful and homogenized world of such external beauty, the horror suddenly hits us right between the eyes as the viewer comes to realize that nothing in our materialistic world is what it appears to be, and what do we really have to fall back on (are our friends really our friends, are our parents really our parents—what is reality????)?

HOME VIDEO RELEASES

Too much time has already elapsed and I haven't had the opportunity to praise the videocassette releases by Anchor Bay, remastering and presenting video releases of both Hammer and other major horror movies in pristine copies with trailers and other extras usually included. And for movies which were produced wide-screen theatrically, the video includes letterboxed versions

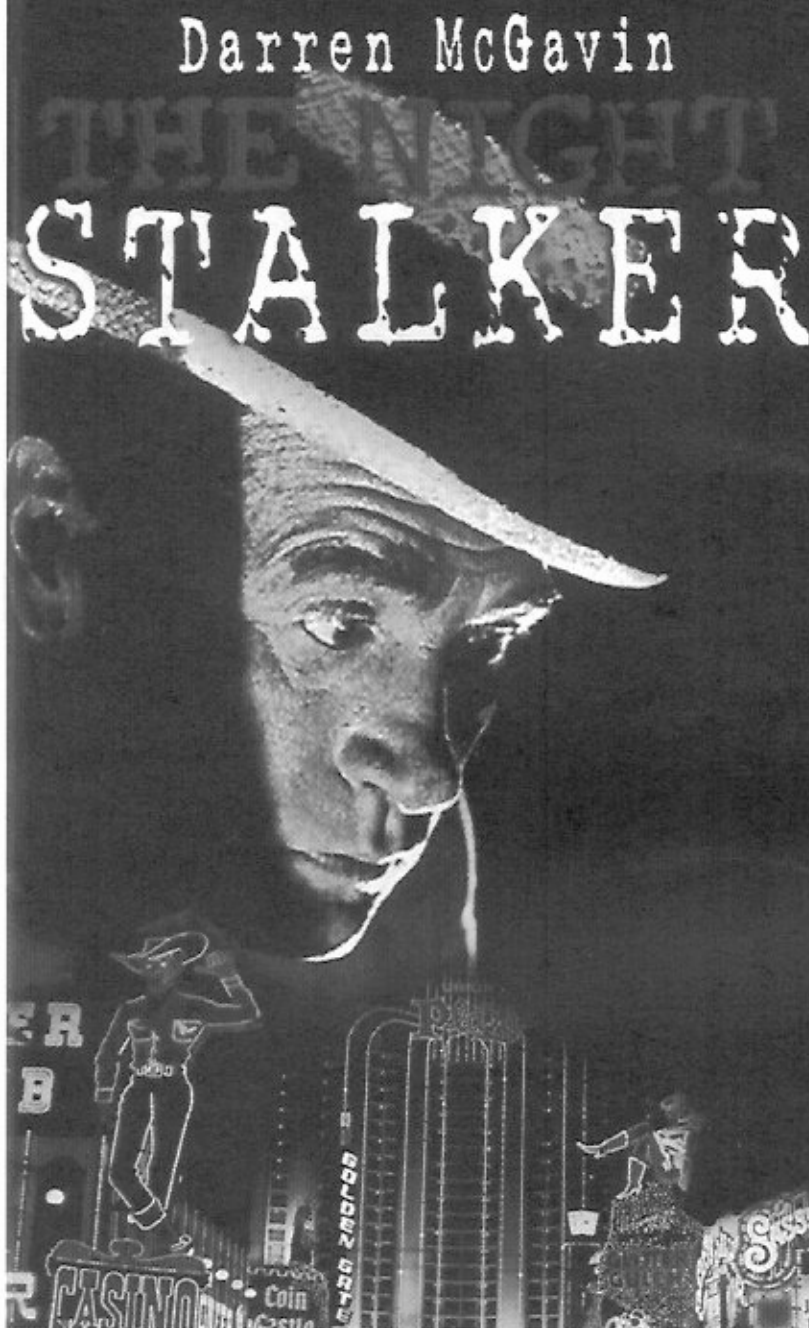


Rasputin—The Mad Monk is another Anchor Bay Hammer classic available now on video.

recreating the proper viewing aspect ratio.

Anchor Bay became known immediately via its spectacular releases from The Hammer Horror Collection, including *Dracula—Prince of Darkness*, *The Reptile*, *The Plague of the Zombies*, *Quatermass and the Pit*, *The Lost Continent*, *The Satanic Rites of Dracula*, *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires*, *Shatter*. Now equally stellar versions of *The Night Stalker* and the seldom seen *The Night Strangler* are available. Many other horror titles are also available. Simply stated, Anchor Bay offers rare, sought-after titles utilizing the best available source material, mastered to perfection, including extras whenever available (including home movies taken on the set of *Dracula—Prince of Darkness* with commentary by members of the cast).

Anchor Bay videos are carried at all major videotape retailers, and they sell at the attractive price of \$14.98 each, or tapes can be ordered by phone direct from Anchor Bay at 1-800-910-7766 ext. 224 (orders only).



For instance, here is a review of one of the latest Anchor Bay releases.

THE NIGHT STALKER: 3.0

After noting that audiences were raised on the Gothic castle bound Hammer horrors of the 1950s and '60s, producer/director Dan Curtis took a chance by trying to present Jeff Rice's novel, screenplay by Richard Matheson, as a made-for-TV movie back in 1972. The setting was Las Vegas with the seedy show bars and back alleys where less

than innocent females roamed. This modern, sleazy world was not the setting for the Hammer cinematic vampire, yet what better place for a vampire to roam! Vegas, a city of strangers, where if you disappear, nobody would notice right away. Women, plenty of women, and women walking alone at all hours of the night.

The thematic innovation which *The Night Stalker* presented made it something new for the old chestnut vampire

movie. And while our Vegas vampire resembles the Lugosi clone by being distinguished, well dressed and handsome, Vampire Janos is superhuman and animalistic, a fiend who is able to thwart six or seven policemen at a time without exhausting himself. As long as he is able to return to his shelter where he is methodically draining young female victims of their blood via transfusions, he can live forever.

Adding further interest to the mix is the devilish interpretation of world-weary reporter Carl Kolchak (Darren McGavin), still looking for that one story that will return him to the top and the gray jobs on the New York newspapers, and his adversarial relationship with his editor Vincenzo (Simon Oakland) who treats the veteran more like a cub reporter. The friction between this down-on-his-luck reporter and his doubting Thomas editor create just as much conflict as the Vegas murder scenario itself, the one involving a blood-lusting vampire.

By bringing something Continental and regal to Las Vegas, that sleazy resort city of American extreme and greed, something ancient and classic becomes married to something cheap and exploitable—and the marriage works beautifully.

Featuring some marvelous performances (a second TV movie and short-lived TV series was based upon McGavin's interpretation of the Kolchak character), some classic fright/action sequences, some Vegas sparkle and neon and some old-fashioned suspense, *The Night Stalker* became something of an instant quasi-classic, becoming for its time the highest rated made-for-TV movie of its day, and a movie that demonstrated that the vampire movie need not be rigidly reenacted in the same way time and time again.

The Night Stalker, while not quite a classic movie, nonetheless took something old, something borrowed and something—red, and reinvented the formula into something that, just like Vegas, glittered and shined, if only briefly. It is a movie that weathers the test of time and remains an enjoyable delight.

BOOK REVIEWS

By Gary J. Svehla

FILMBOOK REFERENCE GUIDE: FROM FANTASY TO COMEDY by David McDaniel, 187 pages softbound, \$10 (postpaid) from David McDaniel, 5845 Oakland Road, Baltimore, MD 21227.

Readers of this magazine probably remember the name of writer David McDaniel. About two decades ago he submitted a series of articles to *Midnight Marquee* listing all the books published on fantasy/horror/science fiction films. The first installment was so successful that an update was published in our pages a few years later. McDaniel's reference listing grew so large that he published an ever more extensive update as a two-volume fanzine, one devoted to fantasy films and another devoted to comedy films. These magazines were beautifully rendered with striking covers profusely illustrated with covers of the books inside.

Then during the end of 1997 a surprise reached my mailbox: David McDaniel once again updated his reference list, this time in the format of a small trade paperback, with simple red covers and absolutely no illustrations nor cover/interior art. The interior is simply McDaniel typing out his reference lists—pages upon pages of lists.

As McDaniel writes on the back cover: "Listing all English-language literature devoted to horror, science fiction, religion, animation, experimental, cult, satire, and slapstick in cinema, television and multimedia."

This self-published volume does what it claims to do exhaustively: present an index (complete bibliographic information including years of

multiple publications) of all filmbooks ever published through most if not all of 1997. It is indeed the ultimate reference work for published filmbooks. No graphics, no prose, just research and lists.

For the price, David McDaniel has provided film fans with an invaluable resource, and while it lacks the bells and whistles that other books may offer, it does excellently what it sets out to do.

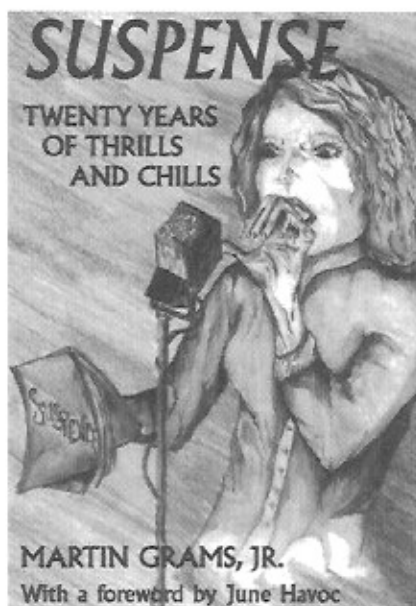
SUSPENSE: TWENTY YEARS OF THRILLS AND CHILLS by Martin Grams, Jr., 470 pages softbound, 35 photographs, available for \$32.95 (postpaid) from Martin Grams, Jr., Box 189, Delta, PA 17314.

Another self-published volume available from the author, *Suspense: Twenty Years of Thrills and Chills* is another reference source and labor of love delivered by its author. Boasting almost 500 pages and a wonderful black and white cover drawn by Jessica Hornick, *Suspense* documents the history of "one of the greatest horror/mystery programs ever broadcast on radio and television" which existed between 1940 and 1962. The book, with a wonderful introduction written by actress June Havoc, presents memories from the directors, writers, sound effects men and actors including Ray Kemper, Rosemary Rice, Ralph Bell, Parley Baer, Ray Bradbury, Roddy McDowall and others. As structured the book includes a detailed broadcast log of each and every radio and television episode including broadcast times and awards won, a detailed listing of every mystery magazine, novel and comic book using the *Sus-*

pense name and a listing of all films spawned from the series (including *Dark City*, *Dangerous Crossing*, *Crossfire* and *Sorry, Wrong Number*).

Interestingly enough, Martin Grams, Jr. tells the entire history of the *Suspense* series employing remembrances by the stars, producers, writers involved with the series, etc. so it becomes almost an oral history shrewdly edited and assembled by Grams. Even supporting actors, the music scores, the announcers (Paul Frees included) are covered. When I think of similar volumes on TV series such as *Twilight Zone*, *Outer Limits*, and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, never have quotes from so many stars and participants been included in one volume!

My only complaint concerns the quality of the photos/ads published. Many appear to have been shot from



inferior photo copies and not the original published ads/photos, and even the few ads which appear to be originals are printed lightly with very little contrast. This is probably more a problem with the book's printer. But the photos are inconsequential and most are printed small.

The book, again mainly a reference work, consists of the log of the 945 individual radio episodes with all pertinent information clearly included. The 260 additional TV episodes are listed separately from the radio editions (although some of the same stories used on radio were filmed on television).

With even the most casual fan of the series, this is a must-have book, a book whose wealth of research alone impresses. One might question whether the radio/TV series deserves such an exhaustive approach, but Martin Grams, Jr.'s passion and enthusiasm for the project answers that question. But as he offers on the back cover, and it is so true, "[If] you enjoy reading about Hollywood and the stars who made it, one look and you'll be hooked."

What a shame that legitimate publishers passed on this work and that Grams had to use a vanity press to get the book out there. Because he invested his own sweat, blood, money and time, Grams' book deserves to be purchased to help the author recoup his money. Besides, it's essential reading.

HORROR AND SCIENCE FICTION FILMS IV by Donald C. Willis, 664 pages (cloth), available for \$92.50 (postpaid) from Scarecrow Press, Inc. 15200 NBN Way, P.O. Box 191, Blue Ridge Summit, PA 17214-0191.

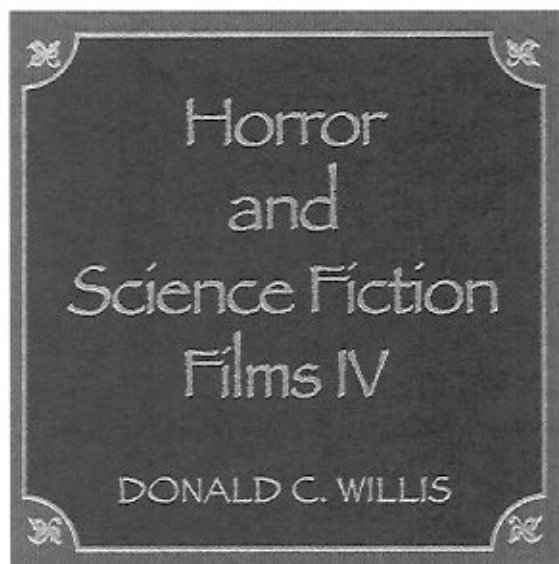
The king of the horror film checklists is back, with the classiest edition of his four-volume set presented by the "new" and improved Scarecrow Press, which is typeset and designed in an eye-pleasing two-column format, (gone are the days of Courier/typewriting text). In fact, this research essential begs to be presented in a new giant two-volume edition that combines all the titles from the four volumes now available. And since each volume updates/corrects/expands entries from the former editions, now is the time to do it right. In fact,

perhaps we should ignore the hard copy itself and go directly to CD-ROM or DVD which would make all the volumes available at the flick of a computer. I've said so in the past, and I say it again: The Willis volumes have been essential for research and writing in my library for over 20 years now, and this latest volume includes the years 1984-1994, or, the so-called invasion of the home video decade. Amazingly, it is all here, even the seldom-seen foreign titles (mostly Asian) that infrequently reach American shores. Even Don Dohler's last film is included: 1988's *Blood Massacre*.

But unlike other wordy reference sources, Willis includes short synopses and critiques of most all the movies included, and Willis is not afraid to stomp on sacred cows and enjoy films that many others hate. In other words, a more casual film fan can simply start with the A's and read the book from cover to cover—and have fun while learning!

For instance, some of Willis' best critiques occur with his coverage of, say, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, which he treats in a very fair manner. He wisely states it comes closer to *The Mummy* (1932) thematically than any other version of *Dracula* and that the "animated shadows" do more for the character Dracula than "Oldman's performance." Willis, like myself, considers *Texas Chainsaw Massacre II* one of the best horror movies of the decade, calling it "a strange marriage of horror and humor... in Monster World, Texas." In his appraisal of the George Pal classic *War of the Worlds* (one of many updates of titles released before 1984), Willis clearly sees the film's strengths and its flaws, then suggests that this early Technicolor classic "might have been eerier in black and white." An odd suggestion, but one that does have merit.

Willis speaks of the "second and third rate" 1950s science fiction monster movies, and includes such titles as



The Black Scorpion, *Monolith Monsters* and *Fiend Without A Face* in that category. To me, *Monolith* and *Fiend* are two of my absolute favorite schlock movies, and Willis seems a tad harsh on their merits. He sees the subtlety in United Artists' *The Vampire* with John Beal, but feels this "earnest horror film does few things right." Again, I feel it is one of the finest programmers of the 1950s and does most things right (superb pacing, wonderful performances by John Beal, Dabs Greer and the child who plays Beal's daughter, wonderful mood/cinematography and a truly tragic tone). We also disagree about *The Tomb of Ligeia*, a movie that Willis feels is "just about the least of Roger Corman's Poe films." And while we both enjoy Mario Bava's *Black Sabbath*, Willis feels "The Wurdalak" segment with Boris Karloff "is the high point for Bava and Italian horror." I prefer the first segment of the trilogy and feel that *Black Sunday* is Bava's best.

But are you getting the point here, this is not simply a dull research list of casts and credits, for the critiques, many of them very short and others more developed, cause the reader to both think and then react to the opinions voiced.

Never has the Willis volume looked more impressive, and while \$90 is a huge hunk of change, the quality warrants the high price tag. Highly recommended.

GRAVE DIGGINGS

Dear *MidMar* Gang:

I enjoyed reading the various new film reviews in issue #56. I was pretty surprised to see *Lost Highway* get a decent review. Most of the people who did see that film during its brief theatrical run were pretty dumbfounded. I agree that you can't try and figure everything out, it'll give you a headache. But the atmosphere and performances are certainly up there with Lynch's best work. I also am favorable to the soundtrack of that film as well. Being a blend of Anglo Badalamenti's haunted score and heavier tunes by contemporary bands, it helped set the mood.

With DVDs now starting to come of age, will *MidMar* start reviewing some of these titles in the near future? Having 20 DVDs myself, I can see that this technology has tremendous potential. With the new deluxe edition of Hitchcock's *Psycho* now out, that title alone should prompt everyone to go and buy a DVD player. It uses only one side of the disc (a dual layer allowing up to four hours per side), and on it you get the film (lbr no less) plus a very detailed documentary, plus trailers, photo gallery, and much, much more. Considering I paid \$28 for it, I think it is a virtual steal. There are plenty more mouth-watering titles coming out in the near future which would lead me to believe that the final nail in the coffin of laserdiscs is closer than many people would think.

Dave Kosanke
Liquid Cheese

We will begin reviewing DVD as soon as we get a player. Gary has been waiting for a combined machine that has

both DVD and Divx. But today we decided to get a cheaper player if only to begin covering the titles in the mag.

Dear Gary and Friends:

MidMar #56 was well up to your usual standards, which are very high.

William Max Miller's "A Pathology Report on Dr. Pretorius" was a superb analysis of one of the most fascinating characters in all SF/horror films (even though he appeared in only one movie). I appreciated Miller's excellent rebuttals of some silly misinterpretations of the character that have popped up in recent years.

As for Miller's comment about *Bride of Frankenstein* being set in the Dark Ages or Middle Ages—well, yes and no. The skeleton which Pretorius detombs to begin construction of the Monster's mate is that of a woman who died in 1899 (a mere 36 years before the film was made). This seems to set the film firmly in the early 20th-century. But a later scene implies that Pretorius has invented a miraculous "electrical machine" which predates the telephone, although A.G. Bell invented the telephone in the 1870s. As Don Glut pointed out in *The Frankenstein Legend*, the period in which the Frankenstein films were set was vague and contradictory, perhaps deliberately so. Setting them in a specific time and place might have made them seem a bit too "real" and detracted from their mythic quality.

Will 13 pages of reviews of mostly non-SF/horror films be a regular feature in *MidMar*? If so, I am slightly disappointed. No big deal, but pardon me a moment while I order a couple of

back issues and wallow in nostalgia.
Marc Russell

I'm sure 13 pages of reviews will not be standard. We hadn't been to the movies in so long, we just wanted to catch readers up on things we missed and were able to view over the Christmas holiday. Don't worry, right now we're too busy to see that many films!

Dear Sue and Gary:

Just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed the latest issue. I got it and read it in what seemed like no time at all, racing from one interesting piece to another.

I was most impressed by your editorial, Gary, which I felt said some important things that needed to be said, and in a very articulate and well-reasoned way.

I read William Max Miller's "Of Gods and Monsters" piece with great attention and relish, although I often shook my head at his conclusions. When it comes to Pretorius' gayness, I felt Miller protested too much against it. While some of what Miller writes can serve as a corrective to overreading, I think it's hard to deny Pretorius' misogyny and his more than merely professional interest in Henry Frankenstein. He does interrupt Frankenstein's wedding night, after all, preventing normal procreation, and his methods of creating life (growing him homunculi "from seed"—i.e., from his onanistic output, without the need for any female "vessel") show that he is indeed interested in creating life without (what he considers to be) the unnecessary intercession of woman.

Thus, his desire to collaborate with Frankenstein in the creation of a woman seems, at first glance, to be a rather strange, contradictory choice. (Why not create some big, strapping stud instead?) However, it makes sense, I think, if we understand that what Pretorius wants is to come close to Frankenstein, to figuratively join him in a union by making this female for she will be, in essence, Pretorius himself—given as the bride of Frankenstein. (Sounds far fetched, I know coming from the guy who wants to deny Zaleska's lesbian tendencies in *Dracula's Daughter*, but—hey!—every movie is different. Sometimes it's there, and sometimes it's not.)

Which brings me to "Grave Diggings." I was happy to be the subject of several letters, and I appreciated the reasoned argument made by David Kalat taking issue with my denial of Zaleska's homosexuality. If you can, please let him know that I enjoyed reading his remarks and respect them (although I would still disagree with them).

Anthony Ambrogia

Dear Gary and Susan:

I've been subscribing to *MidMar* now for 28 years and would advise any respectable horror fan to do likewise and experience the greatest that fandom has to offer. Every copy I've received through the mail has, in fact, been in better condition than those I've seen on the newsstands. However, it saddens me to hear that newsstand distribution will have to be cut. I can't believe those distributors are still getting away with such unfair tactics. *MidMar* deserves to be out there in front of the public in all the well-stocked racks such as Tower, Walden's, Barnes & Noble and others.

MidMar may well in fact be the most literate journal of classic horror films on the market. With the current availability of classic films on video, your publication serves as an impressive guide in keeping those films alive. I would go as far as to say that the major video distributors should see to it that your zine is for sale at all the video stores right next to the horror films.

Tower does display some of your books near the video section. (Of course, publishing a video guide isn't at all what you have in mind, nor is becoming strictly professional, but you can see my enthusiasm for your magazine and how unfortunate it is that some fans may never have the opportunity to share my enthusiasm.)

I guess my concern is that fandom isn't what it used to be and it's time to accept that and reach out to a broader audience. It's very unfortunate indeed that these distributors can't promote your unique publication with more vigor.

I'd be very interested to hear how sales have been for issue #55 with its tabloid-like cover. I think it's a real eye-catcher. I sure miss the artwork, thought. Being an artist myself, I realize there just doesn't seem to be enough time in a day to whip up a masterpiece. I must commend you on your wonderful use of photos, after all, I'm used to it with *Famous Monsters* and all. In fact, I've been wondering if Forry hasn't turned over his photo collection to you. (*We can only dream.*)

Fandom may not be what it used to be, but the "Grave Diggings" department of #55 might lead me to think that it is. My hat's off to you for taking the chance and stirring things up a bit with that "Movies We Hate" article in issue 53. In fact, I got a little steamed-up at the treatment a couple of my favorites got in that article. For example, I don't think *Blood Feast* was responsible for bringing down cultural civilization. I feel those early Lewis/Friedman offerings were more a reflection (read "cash-in") of the terrific hype generated by none other than Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. *Psycho* may be one of the greatest films ever made, but it definitely changed the face of horror, for better or worse, forever.

I agree with your readers that there are a lot of other films that are more worthy of inclusion in the "Movies We Hate" article. A couple of examples might be *Mary Shelly's Frankenstein* or Clive Barker's dreadful *Night Breed*. Branagh's *Frankenstein* could have been the film we were all waiting for but missed by a mile; who authorized

that ridiculous makeup job on De Niro? Early in the picture Frankenstein stays that hair continues to grow after a body dies, but for some reason that doesn't apply to the monster?! And Barker's comic book horror epic really put a nail in his career. Don't worry, I'll stop. Just don't give up on *TCM* (*Texas Chain Saw Massacre*), okay? (*It's still one of Gary's favorites.*)

The photo I enclosed [in this letter] is yours truly after having my arm sawed off in a scene from Brain Productions latest feature film, *Aberration*. It's not a gore film, it's rather abstract and surreal with a cultish feel to it, humor and a slight tribute to '50s science fiction films. I did all my own makeup, and for a moment felt like a regular Lon Chaney. More importantly is that I am co-producer and film editor as well.

It hasn't been all fun, this filmmaking stuff can really be a nightmare at times and it's so difficult to find distributors. We'll probably never make a dime of our money back, but we do have a few nibbles so far.

James Diederichsen

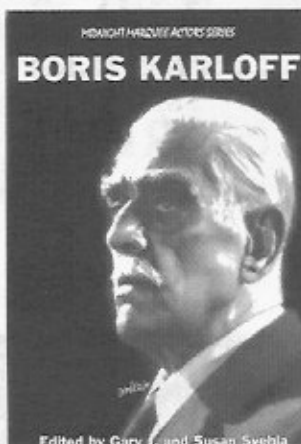


Allen Koszowski's *Frankenstein* (1931)

Karloff, Chaney, Lugosi and horror galore from Midnight Marquee Press, Inc.



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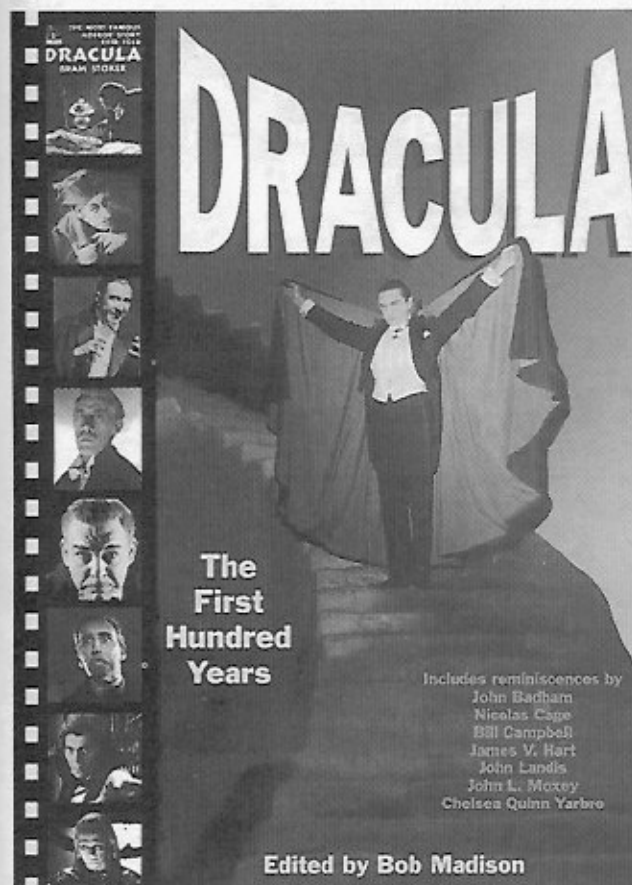
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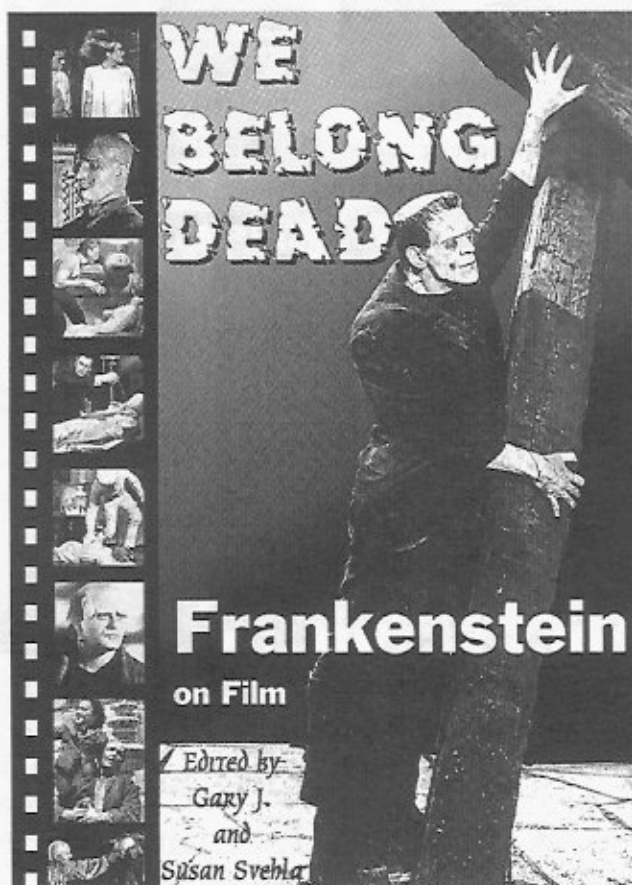
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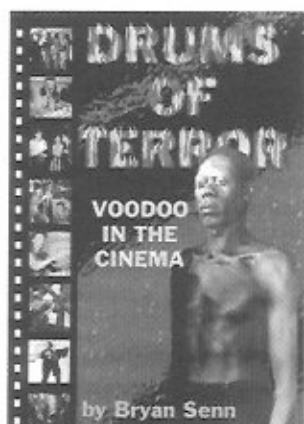
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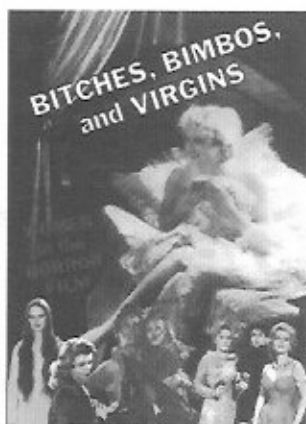
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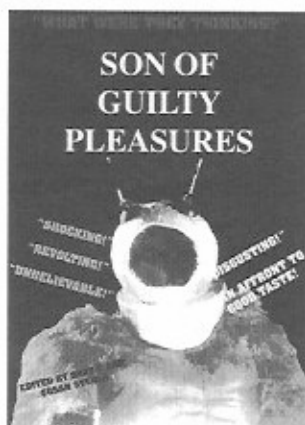
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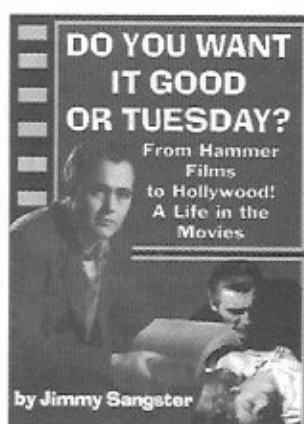
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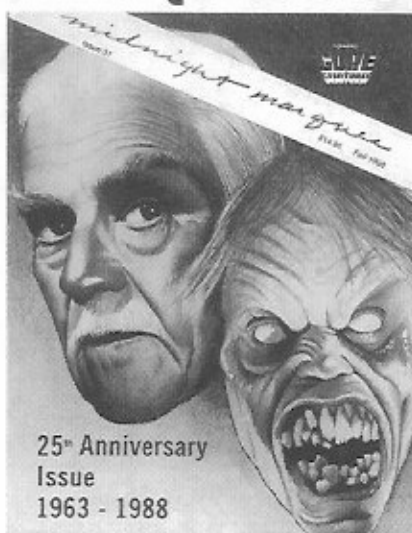
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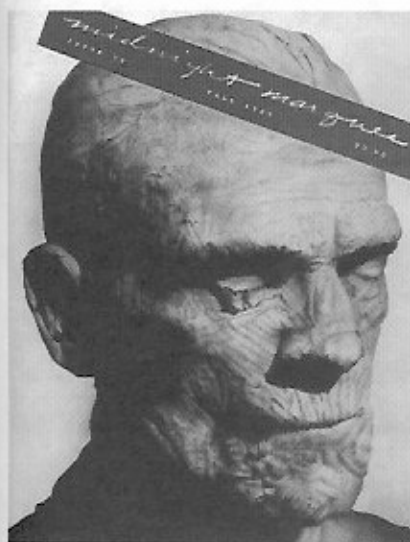
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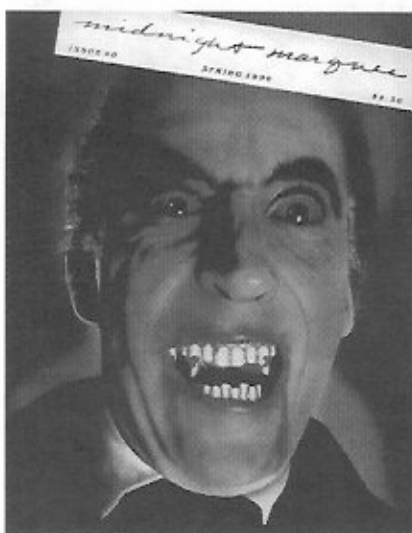
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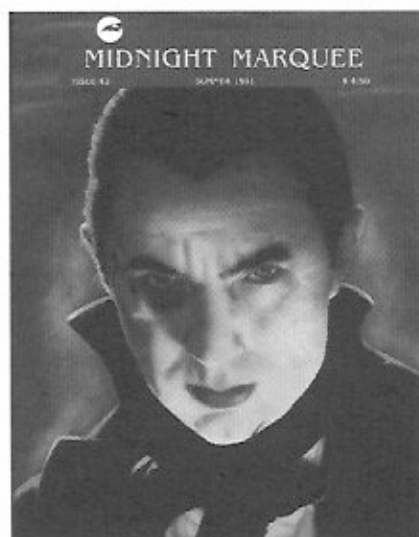
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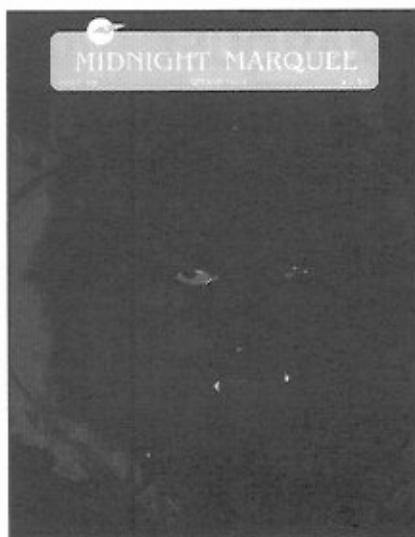
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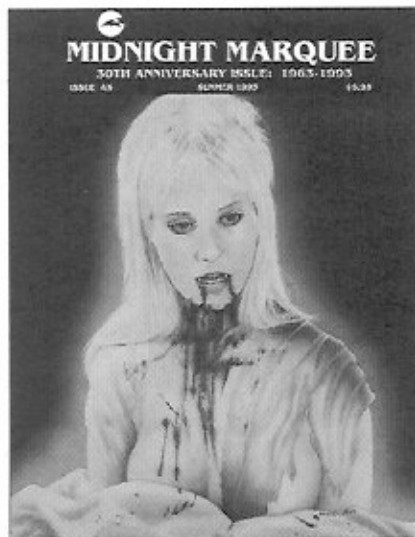
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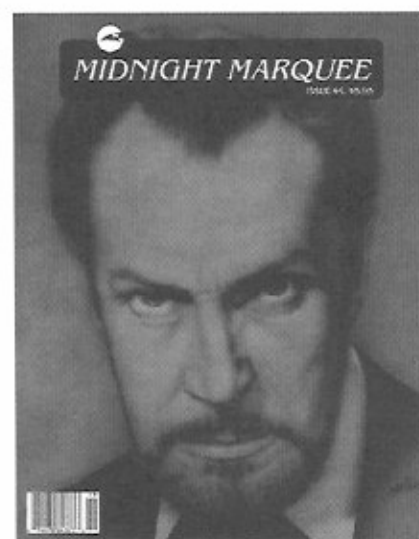
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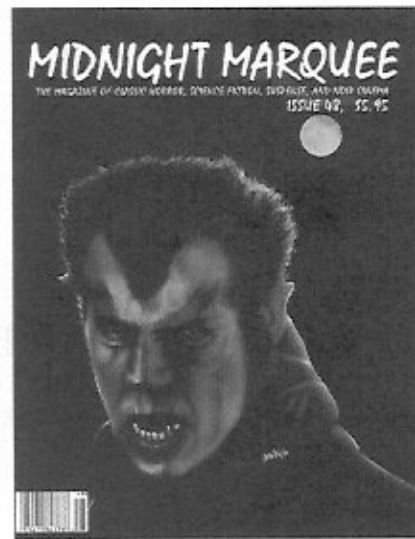
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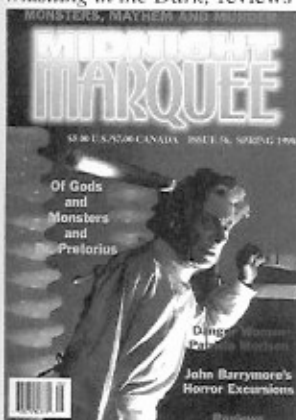
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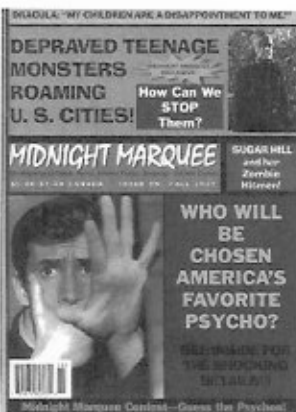
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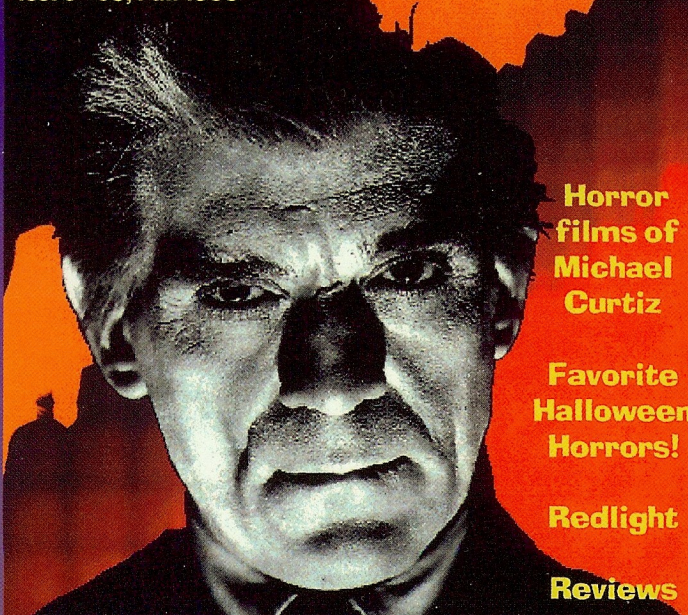
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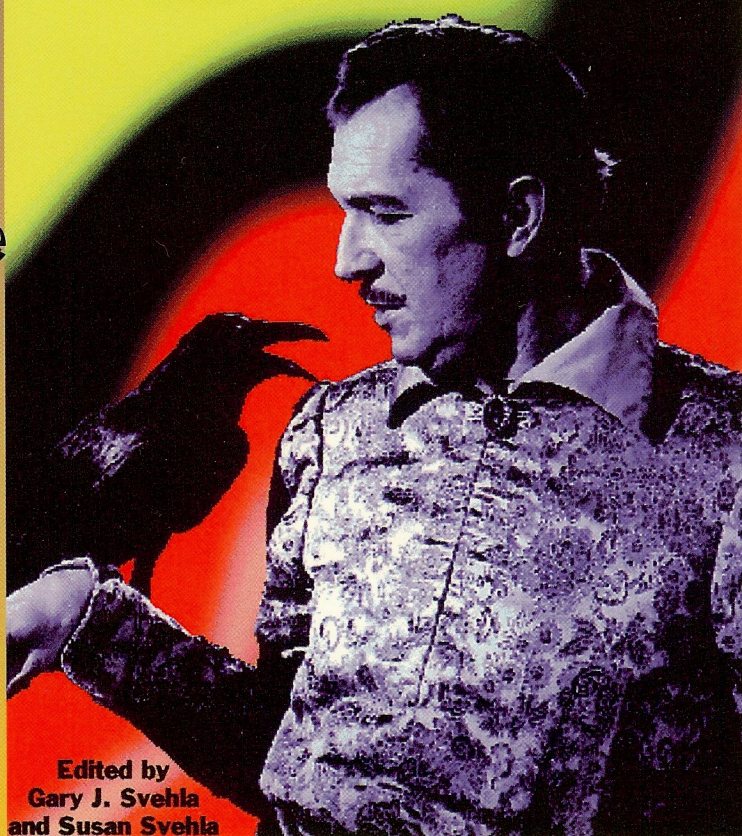
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